

Department of Political and Economic Studies

University of Helsinki

PERSISTENT ELITISM IN ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA

James Anyan

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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James Anyan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	xii
ABSTRACT	1
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Research Problem.....	5
1.3 Purpose of the Research.....	9
1.4 Research Questions.....	9
1.5 Delimitation	10
1.6 Researcher's Role and Motivations.....	10
1.7 Organisation of the Study	12
CHAPTER TWO: THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT	13
2.1 Historical and Political Developments.....	13
2.2 Demography.....	15
2.3 Economy	16
2.4 Education	18
2.4.1 Basic Education	18
2.4.3 Higher Education	21
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO HE	24
3.1 Meritocracy	24
3.2 Affirmative Action.....	30
3.3 Distributive versus Procedural Justice	37
3.3.1 Distributive Justice.....	38
3.3.2 Procedural Justice	41
CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN ACCESS TO HE	46
4.1 Theoretical Arguments on Inequalities in HE.....	46
4.1.1 Maximally Maintained Inequality (MMI)	47
4.1.2 Effectively Maintained Inequality (EMI).....	49
4.1.3 Life Course Perspective (LCP)	51
4.2 Parental Education	53
4.3 Family Income/Wealth	58
4.4 Gender	62

4.5 Geographical Location	67
CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS	73
5.1 Philosophical Paradigms.....	73
5.2 Research Strategy	75
5.3 Emergent Research Design	76
5.3.1 <i>Selection of Cases</i>	79
5.4 Data Collection and Methods.....	82
5.4.1 <i>Selection of Participants</i>	84
5.4.2 <i>Data Recording Procedures</i>	86
5.5 Data Management, Analyses and Interpretation	88
5.6 Trustworthiness and Authenticity	91
CHAPTER SIX: UNDERSTANDING THE FAIRNESS OF THE DISTRIBUTION AND	93
SOCIAL STRATIFICATION.....	93
SECTION ONE: FAIRNESS OF THE DISTRIBUTION AND THE PROCEDURE.....	93
6.1 Meritocracy	93
6.1.1 <i>Admission Requirements</i>	93
6.1.2 <i>Grade-based versus Context-relevant Admissions</i>	100
6.1.3 <i>Influence of Previous Educational Background – SHS</i>	104
6.2 Procedural Justice	113
6.2.1 <i>Application and Admission</i>	113
6.2.2 <i>Fields of Study: Choice, Assignment and the Fee-paying Option</i>	116
6.2.3 <i>Fair and Equal Access</i>	120
6.3 Affirmative Action.....	128
6.3.1 <i>Affirmative Action for Females</i>	129
6.3.2 <i>Affirmative Action for Less-Endowed SHS</i>	134
6.3.3 <i>Performance of Students from the Less-Endowed SHS</i>	138
6.3.4 <i>Constraints</i>	140
6.4 Distributive Justice	145
6.4.1 <i>Uneven Distribution of Opportunities</i>	145
6.4.2 <i>Quota for Under-represented Groups</i>	148
6.4.3 <i>Treating Deprived SHS Differently</i>	150
SECTION TWO: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION	152
6.5 Parental Education	152

6.5.1 Attainments and Influence.....	153
6.5.2 Guidance and Counselling	157
6.6 Family Income/Wealth	161
6.6.1 Financial Status	161
6.6.2 Educational Aspirations, Choices and Success	162
6.6.3 Educational Level and Financial Status of the Family	166
6.6.4 Financial Status of the Family versus Academic Performance.....	169
6.6.5 Upfront Tuition Fees and Charges.....	170
6.7 Gender	173
6.7.1 Gender, Fields of Study and Career Options	174
6.7.2 Obstacles Encountered	178
6.7.3 The Home and Socio-cultural Milieu	179
6.7.4 Emotions	183
6.8 Geographical Location	186
6.8.1 Influence of Location on Access to Education	187
6.8.2 Prospects of Rural and Urban Students in Accessing HE.....	190
6.9 Disability	193
6.9.1 Previous Educational Experiences	193
6.9.2 Admission to the University	196
6.9.3 Support Services for Students with Disabilities	198
6.9.4 Challenges Confronting the Students with Disabilities	200
6.9.5 Impacts of the Challenges on Academic Performance.....	204
6.9.6 Career Plans and Ambitions	205
CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....	208
7.1 Main Findings and Relationship to Previous Research	208
7.2 Implications for Policy and Action	215
7.3 Conclusion	217
REFERENCES	218
APPENDICES.....	234

List of Figures

Figure 1: Trends in Enrolment in Public & Private TEIs in Ghana, 1991-2013

Figure 2: Competing Concepts of Access to HE

Figure 3: Tertiary Enrolment in Select SSA Countries by Gender, 2010

Figure 4: Enrolment in Ghana by Gender, 2012

Figure 5: Region of Origin of Undergraduate Students at UG, 2002/03 and 2007/08

Figure 6: Admission and Enrolment of Less-Endowed Students at KNUST by Gender, 2008-2013

Figure 7a: Undergraduate Admissions at UG by SHS Background, 2006-2014

Figure 7b: Undergraduate Admissions at KNUST by SHS Background, 2009-2014

Figure 8: Enrolment in Ghana's Public Universities by Gender 1992/93-2011/12

Figure 9a: Undergraduate Applicants Qualified for Admission in Ghana's Public Univs. by Gender and Fields of Study, 2009/10-2010/11

Figure 9b: Undergraduate Applicants Admitted to Ghana's Public Univs. by Gender and Fields of Study, 2009/10-2010/11

Figure 10: Marital Status of Women Graduates in Ghana, 2010

Figure 11: Stratification in HE Access and Equity

List of Tables

Table 1a: Key Indicators and Targets for Primary Schools

Table 1b: Key Indicators and Targets for JHS

Table 1c: Accredited TEIs in Ghana, 2009 & 2015

Table 2: Enrolment in the Gold Coast by Area and Gender, 1919

Table 3: Interpretation of Upper Secondary Grades (ISCED Level 3)

Table 4: Distribution of Public SHS in Ghana by Region and Status, 2014

Table 5: Cut-off Points for Select First Degree Programmes (ISCED 6) at KNUST

Table 6: Admission and Enrolment of Less-Endowed Students at UG, 2010/11-2014/15

Table 7a: Share of Undergraduate Admissions for Top 10 Secondary Schools at UG, 2006-2014

Table 7b: Share of Undergraduate Admissions for Top 10 Secondary Schools at KNUST, 2009- 2014

Table 8a: Parents' Educational Attainment as Reported by Participants

Table 8b: Educational Attainment in Ghana (Six years and older) by Gender, 2010 (%)

Table 9a: Self-Reported Financial Status of Participants' Family

Table 9b: Financial Status of Family versus Participants' Education

Table 9c: Participants' Educational Level Most Impacted by Financial Status of Family

Table 9d: Financial Status of Family versus Performance of Participants

Table 10a: Localities of Participants – Self-reported

Table 10b: Regions of Origin and Residence of Participants

List of Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
AFUF	Academic Facility User Fees
APRs	Age specific Participation Rates
AU	African Union
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BCS	British Cohort Studies
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examinations
BSc.	Bachelor of Science
CAR	Central African Republic
CPP	Convention People's Party
CSSPS	Computerised School Selection and Placement Service
EAN	European Access Network
EFA	Education for All
EMI	Effectively Maintained Inequality
ERP	Economic Recovery Programme
ERRC	Education Reform Review Committee
EUA	European University Association
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GES	Ghana Education Service
GIJ	Ghana Institute of Journalism
GIMPA	Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration
GNI	Gross National Income
GOP	Government Official Participant
GP	Graduate Participant

GPI	Gender Parity Index
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
HDI	Human Development Index
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
HND	Higher National Diploma
HOP	Higher education Official Participant
IAU	International Association of Universities
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IQ	Intelligent Quotient
JHS	Junior High School
JSS	Junior Secondary School
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
LCP	Life Course Perspective
LL.B	Bachelor of Laws
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MMI	Maximally Maintained Inequality
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MUC	Methodist University College
NAB	National Accreditation Board
NAWE	North America and Western Europe
NCCE	National Council for Civic Education

NCDS	National Child Development Study
NCTE	National Council for Tertiary Education
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NER	Net Enrolment Ratio
NLC	National Liberation Council
NMIMR	Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research
NPP	National Patriotic Party
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SHS	Senior High School
SLTF	Students Loan Trust Fund
SP	Student Participant
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SSS	Senior Secondary School
SSSCE	Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TE	Tertiary Education
TEI	Tertiary Education Institution
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UCC	University of Cape Coast
UDS	University for Development Studies
UEW	University of Education, Winneba
UG	University of Ghana

UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
UGMS	University of Ghana Medical School
UHAS	University of Health and Allied Sciences
UIS	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Institute for Statistics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how opportunities for higher education (HE) are distributed in Ghana's public universities to students; and particularly, how those from the disadvantaged sections of the Ghanaian society fare in that regard. It was approached as a multi-level (integrating elements of micro, meso and macro) and multi-perspective dual transformative case study. Drawing mainly upon data collected from semi-structured interviews with students, graduates, university officials and policy-makers, as well as secondary data archived by the relevant institutions; it examines the processes and patterns in the distribution of admission slots to students. It engages with the tensions and dilemmas confronting the universities in such allocations, and debates same, in the context of procedural justice and meritocracy on the one hand, and distributive justice and affirmative action on the other. The interactions and intersections of socio-economic and other significant variables—parental education, family income, geographical location, gender and disability are discussed, principally, in the framework of effectively maintained inequality (EMI), to understand the factors influencing the patterns of distribution observed. The data were thematically analysed using both sensitising concepts from the literature review, the conceptual frameworks as well as the indigenous concepts that emerged from the data.

The findings indicate that the distribution of HE seats in the two public universities selected for the study is highly inequitable with students who graduated from the few urban-based and elite upper secondary schools over-represented while graduates from the majority rural-based and resource-poor schools are under-represented. Although there was unanimity among the different groups of participants about the existence and persistence of the problem, their approaches to dealing with the problem proved dichotomous. While students from the rural schools, for instance, exposed their status frustration and assumed a reformist stance on the issue of remodelling the current grade-based admission system to one cognisant of the difficult circumstances under which rural students pursue their upper secondary education, their counterparts from the elite schools essentially defended the maintenance of the status quo. The majority of female participants, contrary to the views of policy-makers, strongly objected to affirmative action for the admission of females; arguing that the policy reinforces the notion that they are inferior to their male counterparts.

The results further reveal a multi-layered social stratification in access to, and equity in HE in Ghana. Almost all the students and graduates who were admitted into the universities on affirmative action basis identified themselves as rural people from low-income families, with little or no parental education, and poor parental occupations. Such students, though in dire financial straits, were contrary to expectations, found to be very resilient and highly motivated to complete their studies; posting excellent academic

performance. Students with disabilities were also found to be internally excluded, facing life and academic threatening challenges, whereas female students reported entrenched socio-cultural norms impeding the education and aspirations of women in the Ghanaian society.

Against these backdrops, the study calls for a rethink of the current overly meritocratic admission procedures in Ghana's public universities that do harm to access and equity for the majority rural students. It further recommends financial support from government to support the affirmative action initiatives of the public universities; an improvement in the conditions of students with disabilities, and multi-sectoral interventions to ameliorate the barriers impeding the education of females. The successful completion of HE—holding all things constant—by these disadvantaged groups, with its attendant better educated citizenry, enhanced civic consciousness, empowerment and participation, in addition to other socio-economic benefits, make such investments worthwhile.

Keywords: *distributive justice, procedural justice, affirmative action, gender, disability, stratification.*

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control. (Bernstein, 1971)

1.1 Background

HE¹ in Ghana has for a long time served the interests of the privileged few in the Ghanaian society (Hurd & Johnson, 1967; Addae-Mensah, 2000; Manuh et al., 2007). In fact, as late as 1991, just 1% (13,700) of the relevant age-cohort was enrolled in tertiary education. During the past two decades, the tertiary system has witnessed a phenomenal growth in student numbers with the most recent figures showing a gross enrolment ratio (GER) of 14.3%, and the overall student numbers standing at 354,818 for the ISCED levels 5-8², according to data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS)^{3 4}. The total enrolment figure also comprises 37.0% (level 5), 62.7% (levels 6 & 7)⁵ with the share of the highest level 8, at 0.3% (ibid; World Bank, 2015)⁶. Four factors, may largely account for the growth in student numbers during the last two decades: (1) the upgrading and incorporation of the polytechnics (formerly technical institutes) into the tertiary sub-sector in 1993; (2) the conversion and upgrading of teacher training colleges (now colleges of education) as tertiary institutions; (3) the emergence in the late 1990s of private higher education institutions (HEIs) and their increasing growth in the last decade; and (4) the increasing social demand for HE fuelled partly, by the rise of the 'middle class' courtesy of HE qualifications (cf. Anyan, 2011).

Notwithstanding the appreciable growth in student numbers as a consequence of diversification and social demand, access to HE mainly in the public universities, remains restrictive, overly selective and elitist. This view has recently been echoed by the Executive Secretary of the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE). In a commentary on the 12 % GER at the time, he asserted that access to tertiary education in

¹ Narrowly defined as universities and polytechnics in the Ghanaian context. When reference is made to all post-secondary institutions, the term *tertiary education* is adopted. The two terms would however, be used interchangeably, as and when the occasion demands.

² The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011 replaces the ISCED 1997. Levels 5, 6, 7, 8 correspond to short-cycle tertiary – Polytechnic Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor, Master and Doctorate respectively (UIS, 2012a).

³ <http://data.uis.unesco.org/#>

⁴ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=GHA®ioncode=40540>

⁵ Data for level 6 which is the focus of the study are not disaggregated.

⁶ <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=education-statistics-~-all-indicators#>

Ghana is still elitist, and that access to education, and for that matter, tertiary education should not be viewed as a luxury. He further noted that “this figure [12%] is certainly too low for our status as a middle income country; if we are to move beyond our lower middle-income status we have to double the enrolment figures to be able to produce the skilled-manpower needs of the country”⁷. According to Martin Trow (2005: 17), elite HE systems enrol less than 15% of the relevant age-cohort making access highly limited, and a privilege obtained either by birth or talent. Trow (2005) reveals that as far as student selection in elite systems is concerned, “the criterion of ascribed status” has in recent times been replaced by a “meritocratic achievement” measured by an individual’s performance in the secondary school or the grades obtained from special examinations. He adds that “so much of the status and achievement of elite universities rests on their recruitment of the ablest students in the society” with very marginal departures from the “universalistic criteria” for student selection (p. 27).

In almost every country today, access to quality HE and the successful completion of same, has been proven to endow individuals, families and the society at large with substantial monetary and non-monetary benefits, although both private and public rates of return on such investments differ by contexts (Card, 1998; Schultz, 2003; Psacharapoulos, 2007; Fasih, 2008; Asafu-Adjaye, 2012; OECD, 2012). The finer details of rates of return, however, are outside the purview of this present research. There is no denying the fact that HE, over the years, has largely functioned as the “gatekeeper to managerial and professional positions in the labour market” (Shavit *et al.*, 2007a:1; MacArthur, 2011), improving the life chances of individuals and ensuring upward socio-economic mobility. For the poor, HE has proven to be a ‘leveller’—a social and economic elevator. But, as Brand & Xie (2010) observe, the “individuals most likely to benefit from a college education are the least likely to obtain one” (p. 293), often due to the strict meritocratic principle applied in the distribution of HE opportunities.

An equitable distribution of HE seats therefore becomes crucial in the interest of social justice and cohesion (Rawls, 1972; Moses, 2004; International Association of Universities [IAU], 2008; Sen, 2009). Justice principles and norms have had a long history, and are associated with almost every society. Fairness and equity concerns are inherent in

⁷ <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/February-2nd/access-to-tertiary-education-in-ghana-still-elitist-prof.php>

humans, and have transcended cultures, philosophical traditions and religions (Leung, 2005: 557; Colquitt, Greenberg & Zapata-Phelan, 2005: 4; World Bank, 2006: 76) for a long period of time. In the *Analects*, Confucius decried the consequences of distributive injustice: “The head of state or a noble worries not about poverty but about uneven distribution...For where there is even distribution there is no such thing as poverty” (as cited in Leung, 2005: 556). Aristotle in his *Ethics*, was equally bothered about the difficulties and dilemmas associated in just allocations; “how actions are to be performed and distribution made in order to be just – to know that is a harder task than to know what one’s health requires” (ibid.). He (Aristotle) is in fact, reputed as being one of the first thinkers to analyse what constitutes fairness in the distribution of resources among individuals (Ross, 1925; Greenberg & Zapata-Phelan, 2005: 4). Plato further argued that “if a state is to avoid . . . civil disintegration . . . extreme poverty and wealth must not be allowed to rise in any section of the citizen-body, because both lead to disasters” (as cited in World Bank, 2006: 77). In modern times, influential thinkers like Rawls (1972), Sen (2009), and Dworkin (1981a &b) have all spoken to the subject matter with different shades of opinion.

In any admissions stream, HEIs are indirectly allocating the resources of the society through the opportunities accompanying the pursuit of HE, to individuals which would not only impact their own life chances, but that of their immediate families and the larger society. Who gets what, when and how, therefore, should be a matter of concern to all relevant stakeholders.

1.2 Research Problem

Ghana’s dream of reforming its educational system to support “a nation aspiring to build a knowledge-based economy within the next generation” (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2004:3) risks becoming a mirage if all barriers to equitable access to HE are not eliminated, or at least reduced. Skewed HE opportunities in favour of the privileged few in the Ghanaian context, therefore, means a further stratification of society, the widening of income gaps, and a perpetuation of a vicious cycle for the poor and a virtuous cycle for the rich.

For a developing country like Ghana, the impetus for dismantling barriers and widening access to HE becomes even more compelling on social, economic and political grounds.

Data from the latest Population and Housing Census (2010), for example, show that only 4.5% of the population had attained HE, and that the attainment rate for post-graduate qualification is even more insignificant—less than 0.5%. The report, therefore, fittingly concludes that “[t]here is the need then to promote participation in higher education” (GSS, 2013: 142). Data from the sixth round (latest) of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) further indicate that an overwhelming 64.3% of Ghana’s population aged 15 years and above has either had no formal education at all, or has an attainment below basic education, while those with a basic education qualification constitute 21%. The figure for both upper secondary and tertiary attainment sits at just 14.7%⁸. Across all the levels, females also have the lowest attainment rates (GSS, 2014: 12). This rather low attainment rate is indicative of an economy operating on low-skilled human capital with its attendant implications for economic growth, civic participation and empowerment, and the overall national development.

The crucial role HE plays in human capital development and accumulation has been established. (IAU, 2008; Daniel et al., 2009, EAN, 2012; World Bank, 2008; OECD, 2012), hence Olssen & Peters (2005) maintain that

... in a global neoliberal environment, the role of higher education for the economy is seen by governments as having greater importance to the extent that higher education has become the new star ship in the policy fleet for governments around the world. Universities are seen as a key driver in the knowledge economy. (p.313)

Economies and societies of the 21st century are increasingly being driven by knowledge for which HEIs, play a key role. In the *knowledge economy*, a country’s socio-economic competitiveness and survival, is not only predicated on the amount of natural resources it possesses, but rather, the development and accumulation of skilled human capital to harness those resources (EUA, 2007; World Bank, 2002). In fact, some scholars predict that by 2020 40% of the world’s labour force would be knowledge workers who will require HE qualifications to function effectively; and that, age specific participation rates (APRs) of between 40% and 50% would be the irreducible minimum qualification for sustained and sustainable development (Daniel et al., 2009). Others have made the case for increasing access even more fascinating: “By 2025 two-thirds of jobs will require

⁸ The data are not disaggregated for the secondary and tertiary levels.

some form of higher qualification, making access to higher education even more of a necessity than ever before” (European Access Network [EAN], 2012)⁹.

In the light of these developments, the OECD counsels that:

Since higher levels of education are strongly linked to higher employment rates and larger earnings premiums, individuals have strong incentives to pursue more education. Similarly, as national economies continue to shift from mass production to “knowledge economy” occupations, countries have strong incentives to build the skills of their populations through higher education. (OECD, 2012:3).

Aside from these economic motivations of HE that have often taken the centre stage in the discourses on expanding access to HE, its role as a gateway to autonomous learning; enhancing human reasoning, imagination and capability to enable an individual function better in society, has also been documented (Nixon, 2012:16; MacArthur, 2011; Rawls, 1972; Sen, 2009). This latter role, though, has often been relegated to the background in the neoliberal discourses on the benefits of HE.

The NCTE which supervises the tertiary education sector in Ghana is not oblivious of the challenges confronting the sub-sector as far as equitable access to HE is concerned, and aptly sums up its frustration with the status quo:

About 30 to 35% of qualified applicants do not gain access to tertiary education within the normal admission cut-off points of the institutions. Female participation is about 34% for universities and 30% for polytechnics. Students pursuing science and technology-related programmes are about 40% for universities and 31% for polytechnics. A greater proportion of enrolled students are from the well-endowed senior high schools which constitute only about 10% of senior high schools, in the country. (NCTE, 2011: 14).

It is interesting to note that the country’s current constitution (1992 Republican Constitution) is also not silent on access to HE in Ghana, and further frowns on all forms of discrimination:

Higher education shall be made **equally accessible to all**, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by progressive introduction of free education.... The State shall, subject to the availability of resources provide...**equal access** to university or equivalent education, with emphasis on science and technology. A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or **social or economic status** (Articles 25 [1c]; 38 [3], emphasis mine).

⁹ http://www.ean-edu.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=38&Itemid=85

For the avoidance of doubt and arbitrariness, the Constitution defines discrimination as:

...giving different treatment to different persons attributable only or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, gender, occupation, religion or creed, whereby persons of one description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another description are not made subject or are granted privileges or advantages which are not granted to persons of another description. (Art. 17[3])

This constitutional provision, mirrors to a large extent, Article 26 (1) of the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights which states in part that “everyone has the right to education... **higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit**” (UN, 2012, emphasis mine)¹⁰. On 7 September, 2000, Ghana again became a Party and Signatory to the UN’s International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted in December 1966 by the General Assembly which came into force in January 1976¹¹, Article 13 (2c) of which states: “Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education”¹² whose wording is the same as that of Article 25 (1c) of 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana cited above (Anyan, 2015: 4).

Educational disadvantage in general, and exclusion from HE in particular, has far reaching social, economic and political implications. More pointedly, “equitable access to quality learning contributes significantly to the development of national human resources, promotes social justice and cohesion, enhances personal development, employability and, in general, facilitates sustainable development” (IAU, 2008: 1).

Although inequalities in the distribution of HE opportunities in the Ghanaian context is a phenomenon that has long been acknowledged, the relatively few literature and research on the subject matter have principally focused on a single factor—the previous secondary school of applicants to the public universities. Others examined the issue from the perspective of parental background and geography while some attention has also been given to the gender variable (Hurd & Johnson 1967; Yusif et al., 2013; Addae-Mensah 2000; Manuh et al., 2007; Morley & Lugg 2009). With the exception of Morley & Lugg (2009) who sought the views of students and academic staff, scant attention has been

¹⁰ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a26>

¹¹ http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&lang=en&mtdsg_no=IV-3&src=TREATY

¹² <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm#art13>

given to the views of HEI officers and policy-makers in an attempt to fully understand the issues. The present study therefore, while acknowledging the important contributions of earlier research, attempts to fill the gap by approaching the study from a multi-perspective and level. It also brings to the discussion theoretical perspectives and empirical data, and connects them in a way that is unique; with the view to deepening understanding of the phenomena in a manner as comprehensive as practicable. It makes forays into hitherto unexplored factors such as disability. Specifically, the study seeks to address the theoretical gaps regarding the dilemmas facing HEIs in the student selection process which is crucial to understanding the social stratification the previous researchers had sought to address. In this study, I have also discussed the fairness or otherwise, of the distribution of HE opportunities and the factors influencing stratification in Ghanaian HE from theoretical lenses past research had ignored.

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this transformative dual case study is to explore how Ghana's public universities distribute opportunities (admission slots) for HE through the student selection process, to segments of Ghanaian students seeking to pursue HE. The study further seeks to understand the socio-economic and other significant factors in relation to the disparities observed in the distribution of the said opportunities. As a transformative study, the study then proposes an agenda for reform and policy, based on the empirical findings from both the primary and secondary data gathered and analysed. It represents an attempt to contribute to, and improve both the theoretical and practical understandings of access and equity issues in HE in general, and the African and Ghanaian contexts in particular. It is the researcher's goal to bring a more 'comprehensive' understanding to issues of access and equity in HE and to give a voice to the participants, especially students from groups under-represented in HE in Ghana.

1.4 Research Questions

The research is guided by the following research questions:

Central Research Question

How are opportunities for HE distributed to students in Ghana's public universities?

Sub questions

1. Who gets access to the public universities in Ghana, and to what (curricular tracks)?

2. How do the participants (students and graduates) perceive and construct their socio-economic status (SES)?
3. To what extent do the SES and other significant factors described by the participants facilitate our understanding of the differences in access to, and equity in Ghana's HE?

1.5 Delimitation

The tertiary education sector in Ghana is comprised of universities (public and private), polytechnics, colleges of education, nursing and agriculture (public and private), professional institutes and tutorial colleges. This study does not cover the entire tertiary education system of Ghana, but only the public HEIs with degree-granting programmes (universities). Other public degree-granting non-university HEIs such as the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), as well as the private universities and colleges are not the target of the study. The focus, primarily, is on access and equity issues at the undergraduate level in the selected institutions—the University of Ghana (UG) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST)—the two foremost public universities in Ghana. Research participants include students, graduates, officials from the two institutions as well as policy-makers.

1.6 Researcher's Role and Motivations

My interest in, and perception of access and equity issues in HE, have been shaped by my personal educational and work experiences, as well as the socio-economic background from which I grew up. Born and raised in one of the rural districts of Ghana, I enrolled in one of the community upper secondary schools in my neighbourhood in the late 1980s. The school is still classified by the Ghana Education Service (GES) today, as Option 1 (formerly Category C)—the so-called less-endowed upper secondary schools where infrastructure for teaching and learning was virtually non-existent and qualified teachers were inadequate. Although I had ambitions of further studies in the then Sixth Form towards the General Certificate of Education (GCE)-Advanced Level following the completion of the then five-year upper secondary education leading to the award of the GCE Ordinary Level Certificate, it turned out to be a wild dream. It was an ambition beyond the means of my parents, and for that matter, I unwillingly obliged to enrol in a teacher training college since the trainees were at the time, given allowances to support themselves and tuition was basically 'free'. Despite the sense of shame and inferiority that

always accompanied introducing myself by my previous secondary school—often greeted with the question “where is that?”—I was nonetheless, encouraged by the fact that I could challenge my classmates (post-secondary) from the ‘big schools’, the so-called well-endowed schools, intellectually.

Following my graduation and qualification as a teacher, I was posted to one of the villages in my home district to teach in a junior secondary school (JSS) where teaching and learning facilities were anything but good. As expected, very few pupils passed the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE)¹³, and the incidence of teenage pregnancies, drop-outs and absenteeism were quite high. A good number of my pupils, however, showed a very high academic promise, and through personal mentoring, I helped turned their academic fortunes around, enabling them to pass the BECE and subsequently enrolled in a senior high school (SHS). In the course of teaching in the school I sat and passed the GCE ‘A’ Level as a private candidate through self-tuition, and at the end of the fourth teaching year, enrolled in a university for the bachelor’s degree on a study-leave. After successful completion, I was posted back again to my home district, albeit to the upper secondary level where conditions differed very little from what I had experienced teaching in the JHS. The ‘most brilliant’ students were often rendered ‘mediocre’ when the results of the national school-leaving examinations—the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (WASSCE)— were released; and the grades they obtained were not ‘competitive enough’ to secure the few willing to pursue university education, an admission spot.

Besides, on a number of occasions, I have had to financially support few very promising young people—orphans, and particularly, very brilliant girls—to pursue education across the levels, out of my own resources. The coalescence of all these experiences, therefore, offered the drive for the present study. I therefore strongly believe that this familiarity and understanding of the context, enhances the knowledge and the sensitivity with which I approach the study. On the contrary, I should also emphasise that by virtue of these experiences, some elements of bias might have been introduced to the study through the data collection, analyses and interpretations, although strenuous efforts have

¹³ The BECE is an external examination conducted by WAEC and graded from Grade 1(highest) to Grade 9 lowest. The results are used for the placement of applicants into the various SHS.

been made to ensure objectivity, for example, by reporting all shades of opinion on the issues discussed with the participants in the interviews in addition to the analyses from the quantitative data. Sen (2009: 155,156) emphasises what he terms “the positionality of observation and knowledge”, noting that:

What we can see is not independent of where we stand in relation to what we are trying to see. And this in turn can influence our beliefs, understanding and decisions. Positionally dependent observations, beliefs and choices can be important for the enterprise of knowledge as well as for practical reason.

This is all the more, in harmony with the constructivist-transformative paradigm with which the study was approached.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The study is organised into six chapters. *Chapter One* which is the introduction covers the background, purpose to the study, research questions and also sets the boundaries of the study (delimitation). The chapter also outlines the structure of the study.

The context of the research is highlighted in *Chapter Two*, where I discuss in brief Ghana’s history, demography, economy and the system of education. It is useful for understanding some issues discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Six despite its brevity. *Chapter Three* and *Four* provide the theoretical underpinnings for the study. While the former focuses on debates regarding the ‘most appropriate’ means for the equitable distribution of HE opportunities as revealed in the relevant literature, the latter reviews the literature on the socio-economic and other significant factors exerting an influence on the fairness of the distribution of HE opportunities. The two chapters also cover the conceptual frameworks guiding the study. *Chapter Five* deals with the methodology, data collection for the study and covers issues such as the research strategy, design, data analyses and interpretations. In *Chapter Six*, I shall present and analyse the empirical data collected for the study. The conceptual frameworks as well as the literature reviewed in both the third and fourth chapters, provide the analytical toolkit for the empirical analyses. Discussions and conclusions based on the findings are covered in the final chapter—*Chapter Seven*.

CHAPTER TWO: THE GHANAIAN CONTEXT

2.1 Historical and Political Developments

Ghana (formerly the Gold Coast) is a West African country bounded on the west by Ivory Coast, east by Togo, north by Burkina Faso and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The precise date for the first human settlement in the territory known today as Ghana remains unknown. Earliest man-made archaeological finds from prehistoric sites in parts of the Volta and Greater Accra Regions, nonetheless, point to Ghana being inhabited by humans about 300,000 years ago¹⁴. In the 15th century, the then Gold Coast began trading with European states with the Portuguese as the first point of contact. The Dutch followed in 1598, and by the middle of the 17th Century other European traders (English, Danes and Swedes) had joined; the country's extensive gold reserves being the main point of attraction. Impressed by the country's gold resources, the English merchants then christened it the *Gold Coast*. The British established the Gold Coast Crown Colony in 1874 over some parts of the country (southern and coastal) [MacLean, 2001:76].

Ghana made history in 1957 by becoming the first SSA country to achieve independence from colonial rule after intense repudiation of colonialism and disaffection with the then British Colonial Administration, which heightened after World War II. While the first nationalist movement—the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC)—led by British-trained intelligentsia called for 'self-government in the shortest possible time', the Kwame Nkrumah-led Convention People's Party (CPP) adopted a more radical stance towards decolonization calling for 'self-government now'. Nkrumah who was accused of masterminding unprecedented riots, strikes and boycotts in 1948 and subsequently imprisoned by the colonial authorities, was to become the country's first Prime Minister and President after declaring independence on March 6, 1957 following a series of negotiations with Britain, his release from prison, and his party's success in the Legislative Assembly elections in 1952. Ghana became a republic on July 1, 1960 (Miller et al., 2009; McLaughlin & Owusu-Ansah, 1995).

During the Nkrumah regime, Ghana championed the political advancement of Africa, and the country's independence served as a catalyst for the struggle of independence in other colonies. Nkrumah, a firm believer in the Commonwealth and the Non-Aligned Movement sowed the seeds of African unity, culminating in the formation of the Organisation of

¹⁴ http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/modules/mod_pdf.php?sectionid=490

African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU). In February 1966, Ghana had its first taste of coup d'état when the National Liberation Council (NLC) overthrew the government of Osagyefo¹⁵ Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Ghana's political landscape was subsequently strewn with a series of coup d'états between 1966 and 1981 ending with that of Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings' led Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) in 1981 (Curtis, 1992). In the opinion of Maxwell Owusu,

What perhaps ultimately distinguished the PNDC period from others were, on the negative side, the extent of political violence, repression of political dissent, and widespread human rights violations, which especially characterized the early period of PNDC rule. On the positive side, the PNDC was noted for its extraordinary ability to put together a capable team with the political will and resourcefulness to pull the country out of its deepest economic crisis in living memory and to return the country to democracy in the face of persistent "counterrevolutionary" pressures, numerous coup attempts, and moves to destabilize the regime¹⁶.

In 1992, a new constitution was promulgated after a referendum which overwhelmingly endorsed multi-party democracy on 28 April, 1992. Jerry Rawlings was subsequently elected as the first President of the Fourth Republic in December 1992 to serve a four-year term on the ticket of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) which had metamorphosed from the ruling PNDC. Ghanaians renewed the mandate of the Rawlings-led NDC in 1996, thus making Rawlings the longest serving president in Ghana's political history, having served for 15 years without interruption¹⁷. Since the 1992 Constitution limits a president to only two four-year terms in office, Rawlings was rendered ineligible to contest the 2000 Presidential Elections. Professor John Evans Atta Mills was therefore chosen by the NDC to contest the elections, but he lost to the opposition New Patriotic Party's (NPP) John Agyekum Kufour in an election that also saw the first transfer of power from one democratically elected president to another. Kufour was to beat John Atta Mills again to win a second term in office in 2004.

Atta Mills was sworn into office as President of Ghana in 2009 when he beat the ruling NPP's candidate—Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo—by a hair's breadth in the 2008 Presidential Elections whose winner was decided by just 40,000 votes (0.46%) in a run-

¹⁵ A title in the Akan language which means a redeemer, warrior or freedom fighter.

¹⁶ [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+gh0111\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+gh0111))

¹⁷ Rawlings led a mutiny (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) which overthrew the Supreme Military Council Government in 1979 but the AFRC ruled for only three months and paved the way for constitutional rule in 1979. The 1979 elections were won by Dr Hilla Limann of the People's National Convention. Mid-way into Limann's tenure, Rawlings led another coup and overthrew the PNC Government in December, 1981.

off. In July 2012, President Mills suddenly passed away after he had won the NDC's primaries to seek a second-term in office and since the constitution mandates the vice-president to serve the unexpired term of office of the president under such circumstances, John Dramani Mahama was sworn in by the Parliament of Ghana as President for Mills' remaining five months. John Mahama contested and won the elections of 7 December, 2012 and was subsequently sworn into office on 7 January, 2013. The opposition NPP and its flagbearer petitioned Ghana's Supreme Court to annul the election of John Dramani Mahama citing widespread voting infractions. Ghana scored another democratic point when the legal battle which spanned almost eight months, ended with the Supreme Court upholding the election results and the opposition NPP gracefully accepting the verdict without any further appeals and recourse to violence. Evidently, Ghana's political history has been a chequered one, but the country has been able to break off the shackles of military rule and political instability. In a politically turbulent region of Africa, Ghana today is regarded as a stable democracy.

2.2 Demography

The latest Population and Housing Census conducted in 2010 puts Ghana's population at approximately 24.7 million, representing a 30.4% increase over that of 2000 which stood at 18.9 million. Of the 10 administrative regions, the Ashanti Region is the most populous (see Appendix 2) with 19.4% of the total population followed by Greater Accra (14%) which is home to Accra—the capital city (GSS, 2013a: 10). Ghana is ethnically and linguistically diverse. The country is currently home to about 52 ethnic groups. The major ethnic groupings are: Akan (47.5%), Mole-Dagbani (16.6%), Ewe (13.9%), Ga-Dangme (7.4%), Guan (3.7%), Grusi (2.5%), Mande (1.1%) and others (1.4%) [GSS, 2013b:61]. A total of 79 indigenous languages are spoken in Ghana¹⁸ with the English Language being the *lingua franca*. English is also the medium of instruction at all levels of education, although children in lower primary schools are instructed in the local language alongside the English Language. Of the 79 languages, 10 including (Akan, Ewe, Dagbane, Dagaare, Dangbe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem and Nzema), however, are recognised for the purposes of official translation and publications and are also used in national radio and television broadcasts¹⁹.

¹⁸ http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=ghana

¹⁹ <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=240&page=2§ionid=614>

Christianity is the dominant religion with 71.2% adherents, followed by Islam (17.6%) while 5.2% of the population follows Traditional Religion. 5.3% of Ghanaians claim they do not have any religion. In terms of geographical spread, Islam has its stronghold in the Northern Region where 60% of the residents identify with it, while Christianity dominates the other nine regions (GSS, 2013b:63).

2.3 Economy

Discussions on the economy of Ghana cannot be divorced from the country's colonial past, political (in)stability; and as an exporter of primary commodities, the volatility of commodity prices on the world market. The economy has seen little structural transformation since the country gained independence from British colonialism while decades of military takeovers negated gains that had previously been achieved (Agyeman-Duah & Kelly, 2008; Aryeetey, 2008; Breisinger et al., 2011). However, the economy has been buoyed by almost two and a half decades of return to multi-party democracy, coupled with a stable political environment.

By the end of the 1940s, Ghana had become the world's largest cocoa exporter, supplying more than half of the world's cocoa, and also a major exporter of timber and gold. By the time Ghana achieved independence in 1957, a process of peaceful political transition and one of the best infrastructure and education systems in Africa suggested good prospects for the country's economic development and transformation.... Measured by per capita income, Ghana was at a development level similar to those of Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, and Thailand after they achieved independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s.... The frequent changes of governments in Ghana, many of which came to power by means of military coups d'états...damaged Ghana considerably by preventing it from moving from the inappropriate strategies that were adopted immediately after independence. (Breisinger et al., 2011:33-35)

Significant to Ghana's economic history is the role played by the Bretton Woods institutions. Under the PNDC regime, the government embarked on an Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) under the auspices of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1983. The ERP was implemented in two phases. The first phase (ERP I) which spanned a period of three years, primarily sought to achieve macroeconomic stability while its successor, (ERP II), which commenced in 1987 focused on structural and institutional issues; bringing in its wake trade liberalisation, civil service and educational reforms which saw the birth of private educational provision, and most importantly, the introduction of cost-recovery measures in the education and health sectors (Manuh et al., 2007; Anyan, 2010). These IMF and World Bank prescriptions could however not resuscitate the ailing economy, for

which reason the NPP Government upon assumption of office in 2001 signed on to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC)—another treatment from the Bretton Woods to address the country’s economic maladies. Under the enhanced HIPC, the total debt relief for the country from all its creditors amounted to US\$ 3.5 billion²⁰. Today, Ghana is ranked as a Lower-Middle Income country with a GDP (current US\$) of US\$ 38.65 billion for 2014²¹. The economy of Ghana has contracted for the fourth consecutive year with growth rate for 2015 estimated at 3.9%. The downward trend is largely attributable to the energy crisis, unmanageable external and domestic debt burdens—which had increased from 55.8% at the end of 2013 to 67.1% in December, 2014—financial imbalances, and a general deterioration of macroeconomic indicators (AfDB, OECD, UNDP, 2015: 1). As regards the structure of the economy, Agriculture which used to be the mainstay of the economy now has the lowest share (15.7%). The Services sector is in the clear lead with 50.2% followed by Industry with 34.1% (ibid; GSS, 2015: 2). The increasing dominance of the Services sector, potentially heralds a shift towards a more knowledge-based economy, necessitating an urgent need to develop and accumulate highly skilled human capital through context-relevant HE.

Data from the World Bank indicate that Ghana’s Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (in current US\$) has more than tripled from US\$ 470.0 in 2005 to US\$1,620.0 in 2014. It is however distant from the average for lower-middle income countries for which Ghana belongs, which increased from US\$ 850.1 to US\$ 2,037.3 during the period under review²². Although the incidence of poverty has seen an appreciable downturn from 52% in 1991 to 28% in 2006, the World Bank further believes that the reduction is geographically lopsided. “Ghana’s poverty reduction has been driven by growth and not by improvement in equity. There are significant regional disparities between the northern savannah regions (58%) and the rest of the country (19%)”²³. Ghana is ranked 138th on UNDP’s, Human Development Index (HDI²⁴) according to data for 2015 and the

²⁰ <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/GHANAEXTN/0,contentMDK:20225788~menuPK:351971~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:351952,00.html>

²¹ http://data.worldbank.org/country/ghana#cp_wdi

²² <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD/countries/GH-ZF-XN?display=graph>

²³ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ghana/overview>

²⁴ The HDI is a measure for determining a country’s long-term progress in three primary spheres of life; (1) a long and healthy life (2) access to knowledge and, (3) decent living (UNDP, 2011).

country's HDI index for the past three decades (1980-2013) has increased by from 0.423-0.573 while life expectancy at birth currently sits at 61.13 years²⁵.

2.4 Education

Ghana has played a leading role in regard to education on the African continent. The country's education system was deemed to be of a high quality as evidenced, for example, by the fact that it was first country to produce a black President of the UN General Assembly (Alex Quayson-Sackey) in 1964, and the first black African to be the Secretary General of the UN in the person of Kofi Annan. "The Gold Coast in the 1950's was a country with the highest level of education in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa [SSA]. The Gold Coast supplied many of the civil servants working in Nigeria"²⁶. Addae-Mensah (2000: 2) also notes that "any serious student of educational development in Africa attests to the fact that Ghana has been the pacesetter in many aspects of education in Africa since the colonial days".

Adult literacy rate (15 years and older) for the country for 2015 which is approximately 77% comprising 82% male literacy and 71% female²⁷, is higher than the SSA average (59%) but lower than that of the World (84%)²⁸, but also represents a considerable increase over the prevailing rate a decade and a half ago (2000) which stood at 58% (ibid.). The most recent data on public expenditure on education (2011) show a commitment of 8.1% of GDP and 30.8% of total government expenditure, both of which are the highest since 2004. Government expenditure per tertiary student (in PPP\$) has on the contrary more than halved during the period under review, from US\$ 6,576.3 in 2004 to US\$ 3,197.1 in 2011²⁹ which might have been occasioned by the growing pursuit of full cost-recovery measures in the public TEIs, but also an injection of internal efficiency into the operations of the institutions.

2.4.1 Basic Education

Compulsory education in Ghana begins at age six. The 2007 Education Reform that sought to mainstream the two-year preschool education —*kindergarten*—into the formal system of education has meant that compulsory education begins at age four. Primary

²⁵ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/GHA>

²⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/14chapter3.shtml>

²⁷ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=GHA®ioncode=40540>

²⁸ <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=166> (latest available data for 2012)

²⁹ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=GHA®ioncode=40540>

school pupils transition to the three-year JHS³⁰ after the sixth grade—Primary Six—based on a continuous internal assessment without a national exam. At the end of the JHS, however, the pupils take a national examination—the BECE—independently administered by the WAEC, which qualifies them for a competitive placement and admission into the senior high school (SHS). As of the 2010/2011 academic year, the number of primary schools in Ghana stood at 19,723 (27% private) with a total enrolment of approximately 4 million (19% private). At the JHS level, there were a total of 11,709 schools (28% private) enrolling nearly 1.3 million (18% private) according to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2011). Ghana has been aggressively pursuing pro-poor interventions such as the abolition of fees at the basic level through the implementation of a Capitation Grant in 2004, the introduction of a School Feeding Programme that gives pupils in the public schools one meal a day, and most recently a free school uniform policy. A one-laptop-per-child policy was also recently undertaken to boost information and communications technology (ICT) education at the basic level.

Table 1a: Key Indicators and Targets for Primary Schools

Indicators	2002 (%)	2005	2008 (%)	2011(%)	Target (2015) %
GER (%)	80	88	95	96	107
NER (%)	n.a	59	78	78	90
% Female	47	47	49	49	50
Completion Rate (%)	66	79	88	92	100
% Trained Teachers	77	72	59	51	95
Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)	33	35	35	32	35
Transition to JHS (%)	85	n.a	101*	86	100

* Figure exceeds 100% due to the enrolment of under and over-aged pupils.

Sources: Author based on MoE, 2009: 7; 2011: 10-14.

As Tables 1a & 1b show, the country made steady progress in achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goal (MDG) two, which sought to universalise primary

³⁰ The 1987 Education Reforms reduced the duration of the four-year elementary (middle) school to three years. The middle school then became known as the junior secondary school (JSS) which has subsequently been re-christened JHS.

education by 2015, particularly in the area of enrolment, but challenges remain in respect of completion rates; and the MDG target of eliminating gender disparity at the primary and secondary levels of education preferably by 2005, has already been missed.

Table 1b: Key Indicators and Targets for JHS

Indicators	2002 (%)	2005	2008 (%)	2011(%)	Target (2015) %
GER (%)	62	73	79	80	90
NER (%)	n.a	70	53	46	90
% Female	45	44	47	47	50
Completion Rate (%)	75	60	68	67	100
% Trained Teachers	88	74	76	66	95
Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR)	18	19	17	16	25
BECE Pass Rate (%)	61	62	63*	n.a.	90
Transition to SHS (%)	30	n.a.	52*	39	60

* 2007 data.

Sources: *ibid.*, MoE, 2011: 16-22

2.4.2 Secondary Education

The theoretical age for upper secondary education in Ghana is 15 years. Until 1987, students spent five years in upper secondary and sat for a school-leaving exam leading to the award of GCE 'O' Level before transitioning to the Sixth Form where they spent two years before sitting for the GCE 'A' Level examinations which was the qualifying examination for entrance into the universities. The 1987 Education Reform, however, shortened the seven-year pre-university education to four years, gradually phased out both the Anglophone West African GCE 'O' and 'A' Level examinations and substituted them with a national one—the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSSCE)— for entrance into tertiary education institutions (TEIs). The duration of university education was, nonetheless, increased by an additional year. Two decades into the implementation of the 1987 Reforms, a new educational structure was promulgated when the government commissioned the Education Reforms Review Committee (ERRC) in 2002, and issued a *White Paper* on the Committee's recommendations in 2004.

The new educational structure got started in 2007. As far as upper secondary education is concerned, the 2007 Reform changed the name from senior secondary school (SSS) to SHS, but most significantly, added an additional year to its duration ostensibly to improve the pass rate in the school-leaving and TE qualifying exams by allowing students and teachers, particularly those in the rural schools, ample time to complete the syllabus. Barely two years into the implementation of the 2007 Reforms, the duration of upper secondary education reverted to three years following a change in government (cf. Anyan, 2015). The data available indicate that there was a total of 721(29% private) SHS in Ghana as of the 2010/2011 academic year enrolling 728,076 (9% private) students. In terms of geographical spread, the Ashanti Region has the highest number of schools (126) and enrolment (170,089) while the Upper West has the lowest in both respects— 19 and 17,351. Private provision in the secondary subsector is also fairly concentrated in the southern part of the country. While the Central and Greater Accra Regions had 40 and 39 private SHS correspondingly, in 2010/2011, the Upper West had only one and the Upper East five (MoE, 2011: 2,13).

2.4.3 Higher Education

Ghana's first experience with HE dates back to almost the mid-20th Century when the then British Colonial Administration established the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948 as an affiliate of the University of London to provide for and promote university education, research and learning. An Act of Parliament (Act 79) promulgated on October 1, 1961 following the recommendation and acceptance of the work of an International Commission changed the status of the College to a full-fledged university—University of Ghana³¹.

Today, the Ghanaian educational landscape is 'littered' with a host of public and private TEIs totalling 189 including 10 public universities³². The figure represents a 50% increase in the number of accredited TEIs in just six years (see Table 1c). As of August 2015, there were 52 unaccredited TEIs, according to NAB (NAB website, 2015). The NAB is one of the two buffer organisations established in 1993 by government as the quality assurance agency for the tertiary subsector. Institutional and programme accreditation

³¹ <http://www.ug.edu.gh/index1.php?linkid=243&sublinkid=72>

³² Two public universities (University of Allied & Health Sciences, Ho and the University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani) were added in 2012 while the Institute of Professional Studies was awarded a presidential charter to become the University of Professional Studies, Accra. The Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) has also attained a full university status.

are both required from TEIs. The NAB accredits institutions and programmes for a period between three to five years before they can operate. New universities are first accredited as university colleges and mentored by full-fledged universities, whether home or abroad, until they are deemed matured to award their own degrees after a presidential charter has been granted.

Table 1c: Accredited TEIs in Ghana, 2009 & 2015

Type of Institution	2009	2015
Public Universities	6	10
Other Public Tertiary Inst. (professional)	2	5
Chartered* Private Tertiary Institutions	4	3
Private Tertiary Institutions (Degree granting)	45	76**
Polytechnics	10	10
Tutorial Colleges	n.a.	12
Public Colleges of Education	38	36
Private Colleges of Education	1	8
Public Nursing Training Colleges	14	23
Private Nursing Training Colleges	4	5
Public College of Agriculture	n.a.	1
Total	126	189

* Granted Presidential authority to award qualifications.

** Figure includes nine foreign universities with branch campuses in Ghana, one regionally owned (West Africa) institution and three institutions registered as distance learning (qualifications awarded by a foreign institution).

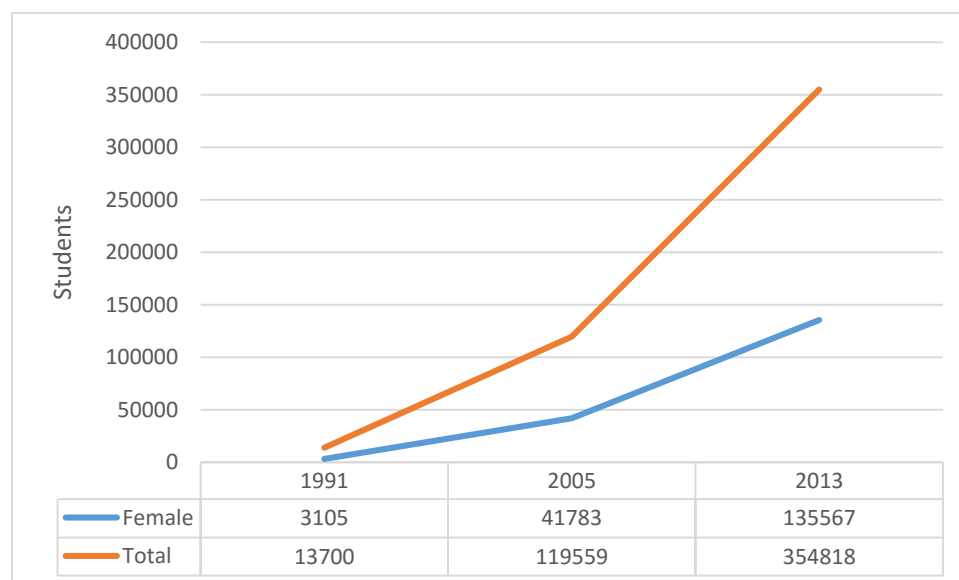
Sources: Author's calculations based on National Accreditation Board (NAB) website, 2009; 2015³³ data.

As indicated by Figure 1 enrolment in Ghana's TEIs has increased by a factor of 26 in the last two decades. Although the share of women has seen a significant improvement from approximately 23% in 1991 to 38% in 2013, it is still substantially distant from parity with the opposite gender. As noted early on, during the period under review, the tertiary GER has also shot up from 1% in 1991 to 12% in 2011 and 14.3% in 2013 (UNESCO, 2012; UIS, 2015). The upgrading of the 38 teacher training colleges which were previously not regarded as TEIs in 2009 to colleges of education and brought under the supervision of the NCTE, partly accounts for the current GER which stood at 6% in 2009. In actual fact, what the current GER of 14.3% indicates is that about 86% of the country's tertiary-age population is not enrolled. Mauritius, Cape Verde and South Africa have tertiary GERs of

³³ <http://nab.gov.gh/web3/> August 13, 2015.

41.2%, 22.9% and 19%³⁴ respectively as of 2013 according to the most recent data from UIS³⁵. The GER for developing countries is 26.7%, SSA average is estimated at 8.2% and the World at 32.9% for 2013³⁶.

Figure 1: Trends in Enrolment in Public & Private TEIs in Ghana, 1991-2013



Source: Author's construct based on World Bank, Databank 2015 data.

³⁴ The most recent data from 2012

³⁵ <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>

³⁶ <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryid=128>

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ACCESS TO HE

A theory of justice...has to be alive to both the fairness of the processes involved and to the equity and efficiency of the substantive opportunities that people can enjoy (Sen, 2009).

This chapter examines the theoretical underpinnings and dilemmas confronting HEIs in the selection of students. What should be the guiding principle(s) for selecting students from both advantaged and disadvantaged origins to the relatively few seats available? Will some uniform criteria—however defined—blind to the applicant's socio-economic background be justifiable? I shall explore the interactions as well as tensions inherent in these concepts: meritocracy, affirmative action (positive discrimination), procedural and distributive justice in the context of HE.

3.1 Meritocracy

When Michael Young in his seminal satire of 1958—*The Rise of Meritocracy, 1870-2033: An Essay on Education and Equality*—coined the term *meritocracy*, he did so in a pejorative sense to warn of a society in which human worth was defined and determined by educational qualifications (Zimdars, 2007; Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008; Berg, 2010; Souto-Otero, 2010). Sigal & Tienda (2007) in fact, trace the origins of the concept of meritocracy to Plato but credit Young for popularising it. In his imaginary society, Young (1958) points to the selfishness of families in the allocation of the general societal goods; a behaviour he regards as an inherent human trait. “We have had to recognize that nearly all parents are going to try to gain unfair advantages for their offsprings.... The function of society, whose efficiency depends upon observing the principle of selection by merit, is to prevent such selfishness from doing any harm” (p.20). While admitting that “for hundreds of years society has been a battleground between two great principles – the principle of selection by family and the principle of selection by merit”, he nonetheless concedes that victory has eluded either side.

Young's definition of merit connotes individual intelligence and effort (Young 1958, Zimdars, 2007:27; Souto-Otero,2010). In his view, it was invented to promote social mobility, efficiency and justice, but it has rather turned out to deepen social division and discontent after a few generations of its operation; resulting in the ‘rule of the cleverest’ (Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008:2). Put simply, meritocracy has failed to serve its intended purpose, leaving society with the *status quo ante*. Young's concept of meritocracy has

been stripped of its ironic and critical connotation, rather, assuming an overwhelmingly positive posture for which modern societies aspire to, in the current social discourse (Goldthorpe & Jackson, 2008; Brink, 2009; Young, 2001). In a commentary to his book, Young (2001) acknowledges the abuse in the usage of his coinage—meritocracy, and attempts to clarify and reinforce his arguments after four decades;

I have been sadly disappointed by my 1958 book, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. I coined a word which has gone into general circulation, especially in the United States, and most recently found a prominent place in the speeches of Mr Blair.

The book was a satire meant to be a warning (which needless to say has not been heeded) against what might happen to Britain between 1958 and the imagined final revolt against the meritocracy in 2033.... Ability of a conventional kind, which used to be distributed between the classes more or less at random, has become much more highly concentrated by the engine of education. A social revolution has been accomplished by harnessing schools and universities to the task of sieving people according to education's narrow band of values. With an amazing battery of certificates and degrees at its disposal, education has put its seal of approval on a minority, and its seal of disapproval on the many who fail to shine from the time they are relegated to the bottom streams at the age of seven or before³⁷.

Clearly, what Young (2001) sought to achieve by his latter arguments was that the aristocracy for which meritocracy was supposed to replace has been reinvented using the instrument of education, which by its (society's) own definition of 'merit', strengthens the position of people from advantaged origins. Education has thus assumed a new form of aristocracy.

The main plank of the merit principle, is that only the 'most deserving individuals' get rewarded. Put differently, outcomes or rewards should be determined primarily by one's inputs. It can thus, be regarded as idealistic since such an allocation mechanism can only operate efficiently in a system devoid of any bias (Son Hing et al., 2002; Clayton & Tangri, 1989; Smith-Winkleman & Crosby, 1994).

Meritocracy, as seen by Sigal & Tienda (2007:489), is a "social system where individual talent and effort, rather than ascriptive traits, determine individuals' placements in a social hierarchy". Competition and equality of opportunity are its defining features. Applying the concept to HE admissions, the authors argue that the competition strand of meritocracy is manifest when admission officers pick and choose what in Thomas Jefferson's terms could be described as "aristocracy of talent"; and in instances where the "worst-off members of the society" have equal access to the most selective institutions,

³⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2001/jun/29/comment/print>

equality of opportunity occurs because the competition is free and fair (ibid.). The principle of equality of opportunity is also viewed from a different angle. “The equal opportunity principle is conceptually simple: circumstances at birth should not matter for a person’s chances in life” (World Bank, 2006: 19). Apparently, Sigal & Tienda’s view of equality of opportunity is diametrically opposite to that of the World Bank. While the former emphasises that all individuals irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances should be treated same in regard to allocation of HE opportunities, the latter alludes to some distributive justice in such allocations— “a fair share of the opportunity pie” (ibid.). Thus, the principle is not a simple one but one that is conceptually fuzzy. For this study therefore, unless otherwise stated, the World Bank definition of equality of opportunity is adopted.

Souto-Otero (2010), however, finds the undue emphasis placed on the effort aspect of the meritocracy equation, objectionable and dubious arguing that “academic performance does not depend only on effort. Educational attainment is still class biased”, while family background and other crucial aspects exert a strong influence (p.399).

Although standardised tests are alleged to have been designed to help selective institutions identify talented disadvantaged students from an increasingly heterogeneous pool of applicants, at least in the American context, they have rather become an easy tool for screening-off the very people they are supposed to help (Lemman 1999, Sigal & Tienda, 2007; Berg, 2010). “The definition of merit shifted fundamentally in the past century, from mastering Latin and Greek, to having the right “character” and proper social background, to high test scores and grades” (Karabel 2005; Lemann 1999 cited in Sigal & Tienda, 2007:489). We are then faced with what Gary Berg aptly calls a “testocracy”, or “a society led by those who succeed only at performing well on tests” (Berg, 2010:38).

In spite of the popularity and importance attached to the weighting of tests and examinations in HE admissions in recent times— a phenomenon undoubtedly driven by the stiff competition for the few slots in HEIs—critics have slammed them for their failure to measure other important abilities for learning such as imagination, motivation and intellectual curiosity; pointing out their bias against women, students from low SES and other under-represented segments of the society, and most essentially, their “low predictive validity for future academic success”(Sigal & Tienda, 2007:490; Blau et al.,2004; Camara & Schmidt,1999).

The function of examinations has actually been questioned, and the ills inherent in education-based meritocracy measured by success or otherwise, pointed out.

[I]t is important to be clear about the precise function of examinations that are used 'to distinguish between candidates of different merit'. The 'competitive idea' that lingers behind notions of advance by merit can lead us into confusion because the idea of competition can tempt us to forget the distinction between the efficiency of an examination and its difficulty. [A]n efficient examination is one that says something useful about those who pass it. The main question is, surely, not which candidate can do the most difficult things, solve the most Chinese of puzzles, remember the most unrememberable of formulae. (Hartog, 1918 cited in Allen, 2011:372)

Allen (2011) agrees with Hartog (1918) on the point that examinations that are harder to pass are not necessarily superior. He poses a simple but important question:

"Very difficult examinations are likely to be highly competitive, but are they efficient?" (Allen, 2011:372), and proceeds with what in his opinion should be the touchstone for determining the efficiency of examination. "... [S]uperior examinations are those devices that match people to tasks and are able to divide candidates who can perform certain pre-defined social functions from those who cannot.... **The competitive principle is inappropriate and potentially damaging**" (ibid., emphasis mine).

Similarly, Brink (2009) further claims that defining 'merit' based primarily on school-leaving examinations without recourse to the context variables influencing the achievement is narrow and fundamentally flawed:

It is uncontroversial to say that in an admissions system relying mostly or entirely on school-leaving results, children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds will not be successful to the same extent as children from a socially advantaged background. The difficulty arises when such a context-free numbers-based admissions system is called a "merit-based" selection, and the successful and unsuccessful candidates, respectively, are thereby included or excluded from a presumed meritocracy. That could only be true if the playing field was level – which, by the very concept of "lower socio-economic classes", it is not. **To say that school-leavers whose parents could buy their way into "good schools" are of higher merit than school-leavers who struggled in adverse circumstances, on the sole evidence of their respective school-leaving results, seems a peculiarly narrow definition of the word "merit".** (p.16, emphasis mine)

Brink's (2009) position on the importance of context variables in the HE meritocracy discourse resonates with Berg (2010) who contends that "the notion of meritocracy narrowly construed as test scores or grade point average without consideration of obstacles and the environmental context will not work for the poor"; adding that "the larger socio-political context and function of higher education in society prevent a meritocratic admissions system from working" (p.8). The thrust of the arguments put forward by Brink (2009) and Berg (2010), therefore, suggests that inequalities in society

at large preclude a so-called meritocratic admission system which is blind to differences in the circumstances of individuals in society from working. For Palmer et al., (2011), the overarching consideration in the selection of students should be those measures that do not serve to perpetuate the social advantage, since that rewards those who have already done well than those who are likely to do well. They maintain that “when equity and increased participation are goals, it is important to identify the capacity for success at university among students who do not appear in the upper ranges of ranked final year secondary school results” since “eligibility for a tertiary entrance rank and secondary school performance as reflected in tertiary entrance rank are all correlated with socio-economic status” (p.iii).

In fact, in the early post-war years, some educators felt external examinations were unfitting for modern secondary schools and had therefore advocated its abolition due to its propensity to nurture undue competition. They felt that it was “impracticable to combine a system of external examinations, which presupposes a measure of uniformity, with the fundamental conception of modern school education, which insists on variety”. The argument, then, was for secondary schools to have parity of status making all schools acceptable to parents and leaving them with the choice of sending their wards to schools which in their own judgment, would help them develop their abilities to the optimum (Ministry of Education, 1947 cited in Allen, 2011:373).

A more precise function is assigned to examinations by Montgomery (1965) who believes that examinations should be “qualifying rather than competitive” (cited in Allen, 2011:373). This position seems rather simplistic and problematic in an era where numerous applicants chase relatively few HE admission slots. The very notion of qualification, in my judgment, connotes competition because someone has to set the criteria and the bar for entrance; admission then becomes exclusionary for applicants who fail to meet the bar (however defined) by virtue of their inability to compete for the slots. Montgomery’s thesis then might have been feasible in the 1960s and in open admission systems, but it seems quite unrealistic today, mostly, in situations in which the *numerous clausus* is applied.

The anti-competition and pro-equality of opportunity forces who regard the use of test scores and school-leaving examinations to define HE merit, rather call for the class-ranking of applicants and the use of formative assessments as a panacea for the one-off tests or examinations in the selection of students into HEIs. Their argument is that class-

ranking does not only measure the cognitive abilities and achievements of students, but most vitally, tend to capture other behavioural predictors of academic performance such as tenacity, work habits and life ambition. Besides, it ensures an equitable distribution of HE opportunities across the entire spectrum of the pool of applicants irrespective of their socio-economic background (Tienda & Niu, 2006; Blau et al., 2004; Sigal & Tienda, 2007). Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam make a strong case for formative assessment by pointing out the problems intrinsic in external examinations. They believe that the prevailing mode of assessing students places too much emphasis on rewards, “gold-stars” and what they call place-in-the-class ranking which influences students to devise ways and means of achieving the best marks at the expense of focusing on their learning needs, as well as generating a “fear for failure”. They therefore recommend “a culture of success, backed by the belief that all can achieve” (Black & Wiliam, 1998 cited in Allen, 2011: 378).

The counter argument is that formative assessment, *per se*, does not remove competition from the classroom but rather encourages it; albeit, in a reasonably subdued manner. “Competition does not disappear within the explicitly constructive and encouraging ethic of formative assessment. What retreats is the goad of ranking.... Aspiration is to be encouraged in a context of competitive rivalry” (Allen, 2011: 378,379).

In essence, meritocracy as an ideology is disparaged for its legitimisation of discrimination and maintenance of group inequality by virtue of the fact that the inputs (high test scores and grades) society considers in evaluating merit (admittance to HEI) is often controlled by the dominant group (students from high SES) in society who insist on the maintenance of the status quo (see Hing et al., 2002). Surprisingly, the *World Declaration on Higher Education* which underscored the crucial role of HE for economic and sociocultural development in this century and campaigned for increasing access, in the same breadth emphasised the meritocratic criteria in HE admissions as captured in Article 3(a):

In keeping with Article 26.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, admission to higher education should be based on the merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion, showed by those seeking access to it... As a consequence, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language or religion, or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities. (UNESCO, 1998)

Article 3(c) of the Declaration then requires “where appropriate, all **policies**

concerning access to higher education to give priority in the future to the approach based on the merit of the individual..." (ibid., emphasis not mine). In my view, a call for the democratisation of HE opportunities using a strict insistence on meritocracy as the route, are two irreconcilable goals leading to a maintenance of the status quo and a further stratification of society.

3.2 Affirmative Action

Opponents of meritocratic admission systems often call for affirmative action, otherwise known as *positive discrimination* as way of equalising opportunities for students from disadvantaged origins who are not only under-represented in HE, but who do not stand the chance of entering HE if meritocracy—purely defined by test scores and school-leaving examination results—were to be strictly adhered to in the selection of students. Son Hing et al.(2002) for instance, claim that insofar as target-group members are discriminated against, "the current system of assessing merit is not equitable" (p.494). These biases which tend to favour the dominant groups stem from three issues; (a) the criteria chosen to measure merit, (b) the tests used to assess merit, and (c) the subjective evaluation of the performance of another (ibid; Clayton & Tangri, 1989; Eberhardt & Fiske, 1994; Fraser & Kick, 2000).

A number of scholars have attempted a definition of affirmative action:

Affirmative action can be defined as attempts to make progress toward substantive, rather than merely formal, equality of opportunity for those groups, such as women or racial minorities, which are currently under-represented in significant positions in society, by explicitly taking into account the defining characteristics — sex or race — which have been the basis for discrimination. (Mullen, 1988 cited in Crosby, 1994:15)

Generally speaking, an organisation is said to have taken an affirmative action when it "goes out of its way (i.e., takes action) to assure (i.e., to affirm) that its practices operate without disadvantaging either sex or any ethnic group" (Crosby, 1994:15, Crosby et al., 2006).

A closer inspection of the afore-mentioned definitions, in my estimation, reveals a somewhat narrow treatment of the subject. The roots of discrimination which are supposed to engender the application of affirmative action have been limited to gender and race. As far as the concept applies to education in general and HE in particular, other salient aspects of discrimination such as SES, disability and age (non-traditional, mature students entering or re-entering HE) need attention.

Weisskopf (2007) rather takes a more microscopic view of the concept and stretches the sources of discrimination which warrant affirmative action beyond gender and race. He regards it as “the provision of some amount of preference in processes of selection to desirable positions in a society to members of groups that are under-represented in those positions” (p.1). Whatever form the affirmative action takes— either by allocation of quotas for such groups in different competitions or by way of some preferential treatment— Weisskopf’s opinion is that regardless of the form, affirmative action will always result in shoring up the numbers for the under-represented group(s) to a desirable position. Others view affirmative action not just as a corrective measure seeking reparations for the underprivileged in society, but as a ‘punitive’ one seeking to weaken the sway of the current elite on the national pie:

Affirmative action (AA) consists of a set of anti-discrimination measures intended to provide access to preferred positions in a society for members of groups that would otherwise be excluded or under-represented. It provides a mechanism to address contemporary exclusion, particularly a mechanism to desegregate elites. AA can be utilized to change the demography of elite position holders, making those positions more representative of the ethnic/racial/caste/gender composition of the society as a whole. (Darity et al., 2011:238)

Affirmative action as a concept has often been used in education and employment circles to guide recruitment policies (Weisskopf, 2007; Crosby et al., 2006). Its distinguishing feature from equality of opportunity is it being a more proactive way of dealing with discrimination; in that it gives regard and consideration to target-groups at the decision-making stage of the allocation process than the latter which is reactive, in the sense that it takes for granted that the playing field is already level, and assumes that the world is already fair (Crosby, 1994; Son Hing et al., 2002; Smith-Winkleman & Crosby, 1994).

The implementation of affirmative action in HE admission is often fraught with tensions and ambiguities since it tends to ‘favour’ some applicants (the minority and under-represented), a phenomenon referred to as “reverse discrimination” or “positive discrimination” (Fraser, 1995; Morley & Lugg, 2009; Weisskopf, 2007). To illustrate, although Article 17 (2) of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana states that “a person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status”, it in the same vein, empowers Parliament to enact laws “reasonably necessary... for the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at redressing social, economic or educational imbalance in the Ghanaian society;”

(Article 17[4a]). Consequently, the University of Ghana Act, 2010 (Act 806) while cautioning against discrimination which it defines as treating persons similarly situated differently, also empowers the UG to adopt affirmative action policies:

Without limiting the power of the University to adopt affirmative action policies from time to time, the University, an organ or a body of the University, a principal officer, staff, agent or servant of the University shall not discriminate against a person on the basis of that person's religion, political affiliation, gender, ethnic origin, disability, race, colour or social or economic status to determine whether that person is to be...admitted as a student of the University, (UG, 2012:21)

Crosby (1994) justifies the use of affirmative action in three respects: necessity, efficiency and effectiveness, and admits that the very grounds for the justification of affirmative action have been advanced by critics who regard it as unnecessary, ineffective and unfair. Reflecting on the situation in America, he posits that persistent gender and racial injustice coupled with the fact that the victims of injustice are often not better placed to recognise and correct injustices meted out to them, necessitate the use of affirmative action. He concedes that "no one policy can solve all ills, but affirmative action is needed to lessen bias..." (p.24). Effectiveness, Crosby (1994) opines, is not only hard to define but difficult to measure asserting that an effective affirmative action policy is one that achieves the desired results "without causing troubling side-effects" (p.27); and that, the advances that have been made by the people in the 'protected-classes' should be a pointer to the effectiveness or otherwise of the policy.

Moses (2010) grounds his support for affirmative action in HE on morality: "we ought to support and argue for affirmative action policy because it is the right thing to do. Children's birth circumstances, that is, whether they are born into a wealthy family or an upper caste family, a White family or a Black family should not dictate their opportunities" (p. 25).

Critics of affirmative action regard the policy as one that privileges some people at the expense of others and for that matter qualifies as 'reverse discrimination' (D'Souza, 1991; Glaser, 1988). "A policy of affirmative action that seeks to correct past inequities in the access to educational opportunities for one group...may imply that individuals of greater merit (but from another group) are excluded, creating unfair processes" (World Bank, 2006: 20). A rebuttal, however, views the policy as one that justifiably sacrifices a portion of individual rights in the interest of social justice, arguing that "including such a factor [target-group membership] does not unbalance an equitable state, but rather restores

balance by adjusting for the positive weighing of majority group membership that is ingrained within the system” (Clayton & Tangri, 1989: 181). In almost all systems, the heart of fairness has been to “treat same the same”, that is to say, the same procedures must apply to all. But as far affirmative action goes, a more sophisticated understanding of sameness is vital (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Crosby & Blanchard, 1989). Crosby (1994) therefore uses the allegory of athletics to drive home this point:

In a fair system, every runner has an equal chance of winning the race. To equalize chances, all runners must have the same number of meters to run. In a straight track, the finish line is pulled straight across the lines, at a 90° angle to them. In an oval track, however, the finish line must slant to compensate for the fact that the inside track has fewer meters than the outside track. **Treating every runner on the oval track fairly requires that "an adjustment" be made to the finish line** —so that it is placed at a 60° or 70° angle and not at a 90° angle. A very simple-minded person would see the slanted finish line of the oval track as giving advantage to the runner on the outside track, but a more sophisticated thinker would understand that the slant in the line simply compensates for unequal conditions of running. (p.29, emphasis mine)

The main thrust of Crosby’s analogy, then, is that equal treatment does not mean identical treatment.

On the contrary, Fraser (1995) argues persuasively that although affirmative action is aimed at addressing injustice in distribution, the phenomenon cannot be fully remedied with affirmative action because the deep structures in society that generate the disadvantage are left undamaged; thus, the affirmative action approach ends up creating injustices of recognition rendering it self-contradictory or as some put it, “a medicine that harms its patients” (Crosby et al., 2006: 593). To avoid this double whammy, Fraser (1995) rather prescribes “transformative remedies” which will reduce social inequality without “creating stigmatized classes of vulnerable people perceived as beneficiaries of special largesse”, and have the twin effect of addressing distribution and recognition (p.85). The author identifies two deficiencies inherent in the use of affirmative action— class differentiation and stigmatisation of the disadvantaged— which adds the “insult of misrecognition to the injury of deprivation” (p.86), which she believes can be addressed with the transformative approach, which has the strength of blurring the class differences, promoting solidarity and helping with the problem of misrecognition.

Weisskopf (2007) presents a very interesting line of reasoning similar to that of Fraser (1995) in regard to the effectiveness of affirmative action to right the wrongs done to the underprivileged using the instrument of HE. As far as HE admissions are concerned, Weisskopf’s (2007) opinion is that positive discrimination (affirmative action) policies

target students who have already gone through secondary education successfully; and on that score, the policy can do little to correct educational inequality which finds its best expression at the pre-university or tertiary level. He proffers a solution similar to Fraser's (1995) transformative remedy—investing heavily in the pre-university levels of education including pre-school— to level the slanted playing field for all in society. He entreats HEIs to use affirmative action to integrate disadvantaged students into the higher echelons of society by placing them in programmes that will lead to respected occupations and decision-making positions which had hitherto been the exclusive preserve of the privileged classes in society. Such an upward social mobility, according to Weisskopf (2007), will lend more credence to the legitimacy of the political system and fortify the democratic institutions, while motivating youths from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The need to shift the emphasis on affirmative action away from the confines of HE unto the lower rungs of the educational ladder where inequality is best manifest, equally resonates with Moses (2010):

Affirmative action is indeed important; it needs to be a part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at social change toward meaningful educational access, opportunity, and equity, along with a host of other social policies and programs including universal preschool and primary school, bilingual education, and democratic educational reforms to improve primary and secondary education. (p. 24)

Despite the obvious benefits of an affirmative action policy, its blanket application is often discounted since it has the potential to give undue advantage to undeserving segments of the society (Darity et al., 2011; Weisskopf, 2007; Crosby, 1994) leading to the phenomenon of “arbitrary favouritism” (Weisskopf, 2007:2). The following criteria have therefore been suggested to guide the implementation of affirmative action policies in higher education:

- a. The eligible community should be that which is very under-represented in the most sought-after positions in society for whom an integration will make a big difference.
- b. The eligible group must have suffered major discrimination in the hands of the conventional society such as negative attitude by virtue of its identity.
- c. The candidate group must be that with a “strong sense of common identity” to ensure that the benefits derived from such a policy would have a trickle-down

effect on those in the lower rungs of the group, while raising the aspirations of the younger ones.

- d. The qualifications of the beneficiaries as determined by their past performance should not be far below that of the non-beneficiaries (ibid.:3,4).

Obviously, criterion (d) above introduces some element of meritocracy into affirmative action policies which suggests that affirmative action in its purest form may be difficult to implement; having regard to the fact there may be more applicants deserving to be considered under the policy than available places, and the only logical approach to dealing with the problem will be to select the beneficiaries of affirmative action under some merit.

Some scholars also argue against implementing affirmative action on the basis of class (socio-economic status such as wealth and income) rather than group basis (race, ethnicity and gender). Their argument is that since one of the principal goals of affirmative action is to desegregate and alter the make of the upper echelons of society; “substituting class-based for group-based, affirmative action can compound the marginalization of a subaltern group by screening out of consideration the more class-advantaged members of the group, who are the ones most likely to qualify for elite positions” (Darity et al., 2011: 264). But this position is equally not without problems. How do you deal with people in the marginalised groups with high socio-economic status who would otherwise have been offered admission without affirmative action? Plus, group-based affirmative action exposes the beneficiary group to undue threats, stigmatisation and polarisation of society, which would have, arguably, been muted were a class-based approach adopted since people from low socio-economic status transcend the groups.

Despite the flaws accompanying the implementation of affirmative action policies in HE systems, the evidence available suggest that the policy is gaining currency and its appeal is becoming ‘global’. Countries like Brazil, India, France, United States and South representing five different continents, have affirmative action policies in HE, albeit shaped by their unique national, socio-cultural and political contexts. Moses (2010:35) identifies four prominent rationales that have emerged in the implementation of affirmative action in these countries: *remediation* (compensation for discrimination of the past), *practicality* (ensuring the full participation of the

disadvantaged in society with the expectations that the gains will trickle down to generations after them), *diversity* (improving diversity on campuses and altering the composition of office-holders in society), and *social justice* (highlighting affirmative action as a key mechanism in the search for greater justice and equity). These four rationales can further be put into two broad categories— *instrumental* and *moral* (Druppper, 2004). As the terms suggest, instrumental rationales are employed to achieve specific goals and can thus be regarded, merely, as means to an end. The practicality and diversity rationales belong to this category. The moral type however “appeal to deeper beliefs about what is right and good and how people ought to be treated” (Moses, 2010: 36). While remediation is often invoked to justify affirmative action in HE in India and South Africa for obvious reasons, the same rationale seems to have lost its steam, over time, in the United States where the practicality and diversity rationales are more welcoming to the courts and the public—a testament to the fact that a rationale that may be readily accepted today would lose its bite in future. Moses (2010) therefore recommends de-emphasising backward-looking moral rationales seeking retribution, in favour of the instrumental and forward-looking approach; noting that while countries have different histories, the social justice rationale ought to be the primary justification for affirmative action in HE which should be supplemented with the other rationales for public agreement when necessary. “The social justice rationale is the heart of the policy. It explains, on a more profound level, why a society ought to act affirmatively to admit under-represented students to higher education in greater numbers” (p.25). The author, however, cautions against using affirmative action in HE as if it were ‘an open sesame’ to divorce all the inequalities in society:

In the end affirmative action policies are not THE way to get to social justice; they are *one* policy tool that nations may have to get to a place where social inequalities are mitigated and students of all races, ethnicities, and classes have meaningful access to and opportunities for higher education. Any justification that claims that affirmative action is synonymous with social justice is placing too much power with this one policy. (ibid: 24, emphasis not mine)

The arguments so far point to affirmative action in HE being a necessary evil. Privileging a disadvantaged student may result in the loss of opportunity for a ‘better qualified’ advantaged applicant in the stiff competition for HE seats, which may be deemed as unfair, and an affront to individual right and justice (see World Bank, 2006). Be that as it may, it has become a ready-made and a central policy plank at both the institutional and

system levels, for the equalisation of HE opportunities. Its inherent weaknesses render it a cosmetic, window-dressing policy tool which deals with symptoms rather than the root causes of exclusion in HE.

3.3 Distributive versus Procedural Justice

Traditionally, the theory of justice has had two sub-divisions: distributive and procedural justice (Barrett-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Rescher, 1966; Rawls, 1972; Solum, 2004). In the organisational justice literature, four waves of justice have been identified: *Distributive justice* (1950s-1970s) focused on the fairness of the distribution of resources; *Procedural justice* (mid-1970s-mid 1990s) shifted the debates to the fairness in the procedures for the distribution; *Interactional justice* with two components— informational and interpersonal— emerged from the mid-1980s to present, running concurrently with the *Integrative* which combines different aspects of justice (Colquitt, Greenberg & Zapata-Phelan, 2005: 6,7; Bies, 2005: 86; Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005: 61). This study, however, concerns itself with the distributive and procedural strands of justice.

In making admission decisions, admission officers are indirectly and inadvertently allocating benefits (opportunities) and burdens (costs) for and on behalf of the state. This position is reinforced by the fact HE has demonstrated, over the years, to improve the life chances of individuals through upward socio-economic mobility. “Academic institutions resemble democratic societies in that individual students, like citizens, have mobility and status, and teachers, like governments, have the power to implement programs that can affect the mobility or status of students” (Burleigh & Meegan, 2013: 122).

The onus therefore lies on HEIs to ensure that justice is done in the allocation of admission slots. What then should be the overarching goal in such allocations—the fairness of the procedure or processes of admitting students (procedural justice) or the fairness of the outcome— ensuring a fair representation of all segments of the society— (distributive justice)? The next section explores the tensions between procedural and distributive justice in the context of HE admissions. Aberrant as this approach might seem, I share the view of Johari that “with the penetration of democracy into social and economic spheres, the meaning of justice has expanded itself so as to cover all walks of human life” (Johari, 2001: 351). Colquitt, Greenberg & Scott (2005: 594) also note that although the content of justice has largely remained stable over time, the contexts within which its effects have been examined continue to expand.

3.3.1 Distributive Justice

The conceptualisations of distributive justice have evolved from Stouffer and associates' (1949) concept of *relative deprivation*, upon which Homans' (1961) built his discourse on fairness in social exchanges. Blau (1964) then tweaked it with his discussion on expectations in exchange relationships. It was the *equity theory* of Adams (1963, 1965) built primarily on the work of Homans (1961) which was to become the dominant approach for the analyses of organisational justice for the two succeeding decades. The main focus of the equity theory of Adams (1963, 1965) in relation to distributive justice was that "inequity creates a sense of psychological tension or distress which motivates individuals to restore balance". Walster and her colleagues (1973) as well as Deutsch (Deutsch, 1975) and Leventhal (1976) also followed with their iterations of the concept (as cited in Colquitt, Greenberg & Zapata-Phelan, 2005: 12-20).

Broadly speaking, distributive justice entails the allocation of benefits and burdens (Rawls, 1972; Deutsch, 1975; Lamont & Favor, 2013; Rescher, 1966; Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983). According to Hogan & Emler (1981) justice has both a positive and a negative side, but for the present discussion, the focus is on the positive side - "on allocating benefits and exchanges on a just basis" (cited in Cook & Hegtvedt, 1983: 220); "the fairness of the actual division of outcomes" (Barrett-Howard, 1986: 296).

Rescher (1966: 73,) suggests that distributive justice entails the treatment of all people:

1. as equals (except possibly in the case of certain "negative" distributions such as punishments).
2. according to their needs.
3. according to their ability or merit or achievements.
4. according to their efforts or sacrifices.
5. according to actual productive contribution.
6. according to the requirements of the common good, or the public interest, or the welfare of mankind, or the greater good of a greater number.
7. according to a valuation of their socially useful services in terms of their scarcity in the essentially economic terms of supply and demand.

Deutsch (1975) adds four additional canons for the treatment of all people according to the values of distributive justice to that of Rescher (1966): (1) so that all receive outcomes proportional to their inputs. (2) so that they have equal opportunity to compete without external favouritism or discrimination. (3) according to the principle of reciprocity, and

(4) so that none falls below a specified minimum (p. 139). He alerts that these values evidently, conflict with one another; the reason being that “the most needy may not be the most able, those who work the hardest may not accomplish the most, equal opportunity may not lead to equal reward, treating everyone as equals may not maximize the common good”(p. 140).

In most cases where positive social relationships and the maximisation of welfare are of the essence, the canons of equity, equality and need have been given the utmost attention in allocation decisions (Barret-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Deutsch, 1985; Lamont & Favor, 2013) but as far this study goes, the canons of effort and ability are also of interest. Although the canon of effort holds that individuals be treated according to their efforts and sacrifices, Rescher (1966: 78) is quick to point out the weaknesses of this canon; arguing that:

[T]he principle ignores the fact that effort is of its very nature a many-sided thing: it can either be fruitful or vain, well-directed or misguided, properly applied or misapplied.... To allocate rewards by effort is to ignore a key facet of just procedure – to fail to make a distinction that makes a difference. Also, to reward by effort rather than by achievement is socially undesirable: it weakens incentive and encourages the inefficient, the untalented, the incompetent.

Ability which has often been the most important criterion in grading students, on the other hand, emphasises the “meritarian” criterion— in Aristotelean terms— and a “natural aristocracy of ability” in Jeffersonian terms. But then, Rescher (1966) again believes that “to allocate rewards with reference solely to innate ability, unqualified by considerations of how the abilities in question are used or abused, would be to act in a way that is patently unjust” (p. 77).

Affirmative action admission policies in HE have often been undergird by elements of distributive justice although opponents fault those policies as procedurally unjust as the Abigail Fisher versus University of Texas case aptly exemplifies. According to the second of Rawls’ (1972) two principles of justice, the arrangement of social and economic inequalities should be done such that both are: “(a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (2) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity” (p. 302). To elaborate, Rawls adds that “an inequality of opportunity must enhance the opportunities of those with the lesser opportunity” (p. 303). The justification he offers for this *difference principle* is that:

Undeserved inequalities call for redress; and since inequalities of birth and natural endowment are undeserved, these inequalities are to be somehow compensated for.... Society must [therefore] give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into less favourable social positions. (p. 100)

With specific reference to education, Rawls (1972) further maintains that:

The difference principle would allocate resources in education...so as to improve the long-term expectation of the least favoured.... And in making this decision, **the value of education should not be assessed solely in terms of economic efficiency and social welfare. Equally if not more important is the role of education in enabling a person to enjoy the culture of his society and to take part in its affairs, and in this way to provide for each individual a secure sense of his own worth.** (p. 101, emphasis added)

Johari (2001: 351) also shares in Rawls' egalitarian stance. He opines that "the idea of social justice requires the sacrifice of certain rights of an individual at the altar of the general interest...something may have to be sacrificed for the greater good". Hobhouse (1922: 112) also attempts a definition of justice and justifies why the societal interest should be paramount. "Justice is that apportionment which yield the greatest good... and if on the whole a fuller development can be reached by the crippling or extinction of some members of the community, they must be crippled or extinguished". But such a radical egalitarian position does not sit right with scholars who lean towards libertarianism who do not see any injustice in inequality. The arguments advanced in defence of the status quo are that inequality is a reflection of the natural differences among individuals, and further, there is very little that government can do to remedy the situation since such remedial measures are accompanied by side-effects that are counterproductive. Thus, for a libertarian, the right of the individual should always come before the good of society (Meyer, 2013: 27; Friedman & Friedman, 1980; Hayek, 1960/1984; Sandel, 1987). Understandably, such a status-quoist position would frown on affirmative action in HE and uphold uniform admission criteria for all applicants irrespective of their socio-economic background or other pre-determined circumstances at birth.

Apparently, Rawls (1972) is cautioning against the economic instrumentalisation of access to education. The human capital, resourcist and functionalist view of education which is now the dominant paradigm in the so-called globalised knowledge economy has obviously relegated the human capability approach to education to the background. Consequently, HEIs in a purely meritocratic fashion, would want to enrol the best and the brightest in the belief that the 'best inputs' would obviously turn out as the 'best outputs', and as McArthur (2011: 742) neatly puts it:

Rather than higher education being a journey or transformative experience, it is simply a packaging and marketing process: the degree is the shiny ribbon on the top of the box. It becomes an object of commodity fetishism, representing nothing other than its exchange value for higher salaries and status.... The idea that people may engage in higher education to develop and realise their potential as human beings appears quaint and anachronistic.

3.3.2 Procedural Justice

Procedural justice concerns itself largely with the fairness and the transparency of the processes leading to decision-making in allocation of resources and resolution of disputes. "Equity also requires fairness in processes" (World Bank, 2006: 19). Put simply, it is the "fairness of the steps taken in making allocation decision" (Tyler, Rasinski & Spodick, 1985; Barret-Howard & Tyler, 1986: 296). A fair procedure is thus expected to lead to fair outcomes.

Rawls (1972) identifies three variants of the concept of procedural justice: *perfect*, *imperfect* and *pure procedural justice*. According to him, the *perfect procedural justice* has two distinguishing features: (1) "there is an independent criterion for what is a fair division" which is separate "from and prior to the procedure which is to be followed" (2) a procedure that is certain to lead to the desired outcome can be designed. The most important issue being that "there is an independent standard for deciding which outcome is just and a procedure guaranteed to lead to it" (p.85). *Imperfect procedural justice* is illustrated by a criminal trial during which the law, though "carefully followed, and the proceedings fairly and properly conducted... may reach the wrong outcome". Its distinctive feature is that "while there is an independent criterion for the correct outcome, there is no feasible procedure which is sure to lead to it". What sets *pure procedural justice* apart is that "the procedure for determining the just result must actually be carried out;" That is to say, "there is no independent criterion by reference to which a definite outcome can be known to be just" (ibid.: 86). The application of the notion of pure procedural justice to distributive shares in the opinion of Rawls, would therefore necessitate the setting up and administration of institutional systems that are just. But this seems illusive since presently, the institutions of society are "riddled with grave injustices" (p.87). Like Rawls, Solum (2004) equally finds the notion of pure procedural justice as idealistic asserting that "the very notion of procedural justice as an independent criterion of fairness is empty" and by that token, concludes that

“[p]rocedural perfection is unattainable: no conceivable system of procedure can guarantee perfect accuracy” (pp. 3,4).

That notwithstanding, other researchers have found that as far as decisions regarding resource allocation is concerned, the role of procedural justice cannot be discounted (Barret-Howard & Tyler, 1986; Van den Bos, Vermunt & Wilke, 1997; Lind, 1982; Walker & Lind, 1984). While van den Bos et al. (1997) regard procedural justice as more important than distributive justice, Barret-Howard & Tyler (1986) put the two on even keel; the reason being that people tend to be “more interested in issues of process than issues of outcome” (Lind & Tyler, 1988 cited in Van den Bos et al., 1997: 96). Others further argue that when individuals are unable to judge the fairness of the procedure it is then that they focus on the justice of distribution (Schwartz, 1978; Ophuls, 1977).

Of Rawls’ (1972) three typologies of procedural justice mentioned earlier, the perfect procedural justice, particularly its second characteristic, may be the most relevant to the present study. As regards HE admissions, almost all HEIs advertise admission requirements and selection criteria to prospective applicants, although the fine details are often left out and what actually goes into the decisions of admission boards to select applicant A over B remains a mystery to many an applicant. Unsuccessful applicants when informed about admission decisions are hardly given the details about what went wrong with their specific application (obviously in most instances due to the sheer numbers), and in some instances, there is no communication at all if they fail the selection test even when they have paid admission fees and deserve to be informed about the success or otherwise of their application. Certain unsuccessful applicants often resent the idea that a fellow applicant whose ‘merits’ (however defined) were not as superior and competitive as theirs, have been given some preferential treatment in allocation of seats to the HEI, question the fairness of the procedure and find it rather objectionable that one would be given some preferential treatment by virtue of their gender, race, ethnicity or socio-economic status.

A number of HEIs which admit students on affirmative action policies have often been accused of bias and discrimination and have been dragged to court by aggrieved parties to defend the ‘procedurally flawed and unjust’ admission policies. These bouts of law suits have often found their best expression in the United States with one of the most recent being the *Fisher versus University of Texas* case. Abigail Fisher, a white woman who

failed to gain admission to the university in 2008, claims that the University of Texas violated her rights by resorting to race in its admission process. The University whose defence rests on ensuring diversity in the student populace on its campus, has 10% of its undergraduate admissions reserved for the geographically black high schools in Texas (Asma, 2013).

In 2009, a group known as the Federation of Youths Association in Ghana, dragged the UG, KNUST and the four other public universities at the time, to the country's Supreme Court for implementing what it calls "discriminatory admission policies" which allowed applicants who attained at least the minimum entry grade (Aggregate 24)³⁸ to enrol as full fee-paying students—the so-called 'dual-track tuition policy'—while applicants with relatively superior grades (Aggregate 15) who could not afford it were rejected. The group described the policy as "a sin against the Constitution", adding that "as the policy stands, it gives advantage to people who have the means to pay". Meanwhile, the UG had announced a 20% reduction in admission for that year with Aggregate 13 being the minimum cut-off point for entry for that year.³⁹ Meyer (2013) calls HE systems which deny access to applicants who miss the test score or national examination threshold, sometimes even by a fraction, as "unjust exclusion" noting that "even though one might support such a policy as strictly meritocratic,... 'all or nothing' systems that deny motivated and qualified students access based on small differences in standardised tests is, at the very least, a case of 'harsh justice' (p. 2).

Apparently, in the two instances cited above, the aggrieved parties resorted to lawsuits against the HEIs because at least the *prima facie* evidence showed that the admission decisions of the institutions did not bear up to procedural scrutiny. How then do we judge the justice of the procedure? Leventhal (1980) suggests six criteria for achieving this: suppression of biases, accuracy of information, consistency across time and person, correctability of the decision, representation in the decision-making body, and the maintenance of ethical standards (cited in Barret-Howard & Tyler, 1986: 297). Although not all of the six criteria may be useful for the present enterprise, a few can be applied to

³⁸ Applicants to the university are admitted based on their performance in the school-leaving examinations, the WASSCE. Typically, an applicant is assessed on results obtained in three core and three elective subjects. The best possible aggregate for the six subjects is Aggregate 6 (six grade A1s). The minimum entry requirement which until recently was Aggregate 24 has been changed to 36 due to a change in the grading system and harmonisation of the entry requirements into the HEIs by the NCTE.

³⁹ <http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/education/200904/29103.php>

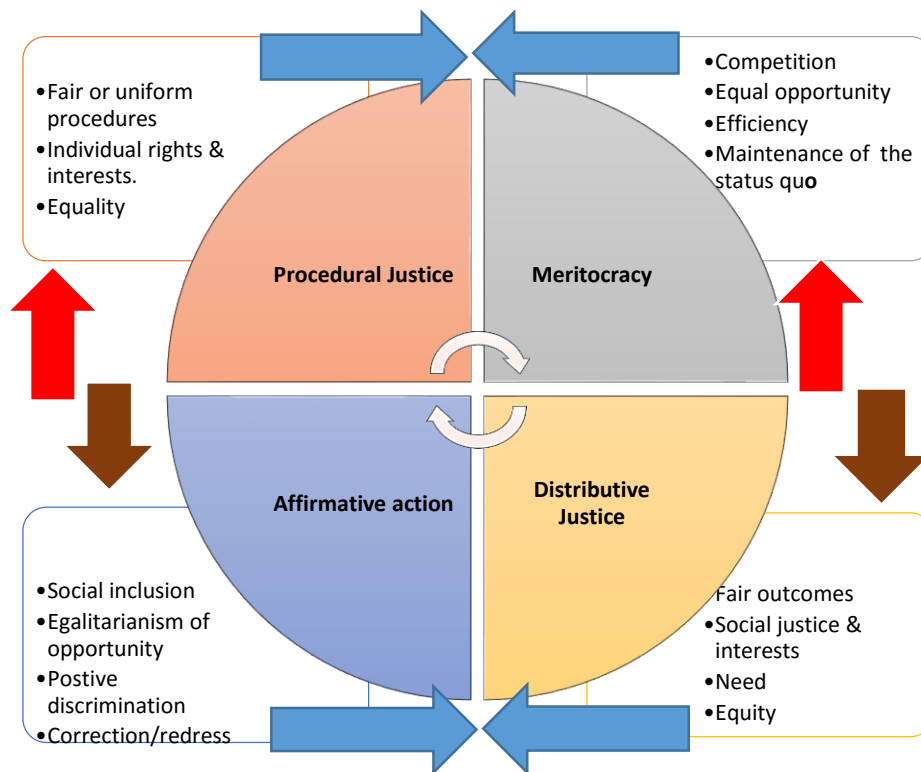
this discussion. For example, the use of different admission criteria for different applicants to the same programme smacks of bias and inconsistency, while most applicants get to know of admission quotas for certain groups after the outcome, such policies, typically do not accompany the admission requirements and selection criteria (inaccurate information). This is crucial because “fairness judgments are more strongly influenced by information that is available in an earlier stage of interaction with the authority than by information that becomes available at a later moment” (Van den Bos et al., 1997: 97). Further, applicants do not have representation on admission boards and admission decisions in most cases are final and not subject to appeal.

Tyler (2012) submits that authorities can assure trustworthiness in allocation decisions by explaining the procedures used in making the decisions and why those procedures were followed, and at the same time acknowledging the concerns and need of people in the said explanations.

As illustrated by Figure 2, the concepts of meritocracy, affirmative action, procedural and distributive justice discussed in this chapter are not only competing or conflicting concepts but also related, and leaves us with what Amartya Sen (2009) aptly calls the “inescapable plurality of competing principles” (p. 106). Education-based meritocracy has arguably had procedural justice as its primary object, and insofar as the selection of students into HEIs is concerned, the former is geared towards ensuring that all applicants are given the same treatment irrespective of their circumstances.

On the contrary, affirmative action is geared towards distributive justice in the allocation of HE opportunities and operates on the notion that certain individuals by virtue of some pre-determined negative circumstances cannot compete with those from advantaged origins, and for that matter, require some mitigating measures to improve their life chances through the opportunities HE offers. The principles outlined in each of the concepts in Figure 2, though, are not mutually exclusive but overlapping. For example, those outlined under procedural justice and meritocracy overlap, and same goes for distributive justice and affirmative action. There are tensions, however, between the pursuit of procedural justice and affirmative action and their goals appear to be incompatible. The same holds for the relationship between meritocracy and distributive justice.

Figure 2: Competing Concepts of HE Access



Source: Author's construct.

Actually, none of the paradigms can claim to be sacrosanct; hence Meyer's conclusion that "no single rule or principle is likely to generate a standard that will result in a fair construction of higher education access" (2013: 26) is worthy of attention. As long as HEIs receive funding from the tax-payer, they cannot fully absolve themselves of their social responsibility towards the marginalised in society. Striking a fair balance between individual rights and social justice in the allocation of the seats available in the HEIs is therefore essential.

CHAPTER FOUR: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN ACCESS TO HE

Although people have long dreamed of an egalitarian society...such a society has never existed. All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of social inequality (Haralambos & Holborn, 2013).

The influence of SES on HE access and equity has been well-researched and theorised in the developed world, although scant attention has been paid to developments in developing countries, particularly, those in SSA. While a seeming unanimity regarding such an influence can be recognised, what actually constitute SES, which of them count towards HE access and equity in a given context, and how such variables should be measured remain a subject of controversy among scholars (Hout, 2004; Morley & Lussier, 2009; World Bank, 2006, 2011; Morley & Lugg, 2009; Sewell, 1971; McKnight, 2015). Pfeffer (2008) lucidly summarises this position:

It is uncontroversial that individual ability is not the only determinant of children's educational success, but that instead a multitude of social background characteristics affect children's educational careers. In whichever way the influence of parental characteristics on educational success is conceptualized, it shows to be a strong and significant one...Thus, the question is not whether parental characteristics influence students' educational success but to what degree they do. (p. 543)

This chapter, therefore, attempts a review of a section of the relevant literature on the factors that account for the differences in access to and equity in HE with a particular focus on SES variables relevant to the Ghanaian context (parental education, family income/wealth, gender, previous education, location) due to the complex nature of the phenomenon. As Lucas (2001) concedes; "to discern the mechanisms producing the pattern of social background effects, it is likely we will need to attend to the nuances of particular educational systems" (p.1659). "Measuring inequality in education is not easy" (World Bank, 2006: 34).

4.1 Theoretical Arguments on Inequalities in HE

A scan of the literature on social stratification in HE reveals three distinct but closely related theories that have been advanced for the phenomenon; *maximally maintained inequality (MMI)*, *effectively maintained inequality (EMI)* and the *life course perspective (LCP)*. Although these theories have all been applied to studies in developed countries it is pertinent to highlight them in the present study.

4.1.1 Maximally Maintained Inequality (MMI)

The MMI was first advanced by Raftery & Hout (1993) as a hypothesis for their study *Expansion, Reform, and Opportunity in Irish Education, 1921-1975* which sought to ascertain changes in the effect of social origins on educational transitions for the Irish birth cohort of 1908-56. The study was influenced by the abolition of tuition fees for secondary schools in 1967 in addition to other egalitarian reforms in Ireland. MMI, according to the authors, means that “...transition rates and odds ratios between social origins and educational transitions remain the same from cohort to cohort unless they are forced to change by increasing enrollments” (Raftery & Hout 1993, p. 56). Specifically, MMI speculates the following: (1) that *ceteris paribus*, the growth in the capacity of secondary and higher education is a reflection of the surge in demand emanating from population growth and the gradual improvement in social origins over time. (2) If enrolments are pushed up faster by expansion than demand as a result of the redistribution of social origins, then all the social origins would up their transition rates but class odds-ratios are still preserved. (3) If the demand of the upper classes for a given level of education reaches the point of saturation, the odds-ratios get diminished, that is to say, the link between social origin and education is muted (ibid). A fourth tenet claims that a reduction in public support for education exacerbates the social class effects, thus the falling effects of social background (as a result of expansion) can reverse to become the rising effects of social background (Hout et al., 1993 cited in Lucas, 2001: 1647).

The authors allude to the wider applicability of MMI provided these three caveats are taken into consideration: (1) higher social origins ought to be associated with higher transition rates, (2) gross participation rates do not decrease, and (3) occupational structural mobility support higher prestige or higher status occupations (p. 57). Raftery & Hout (1993) admit that the MMI only generalises the patterns in their study but does not explain them, and that some simple *rational-choice* assumptions—what Breen & Goldthorpe (1997) refer to as “forward looking rational calculus” (cited in Shavit, Yaish & Bar-Haim, 2007b: 4) —should fill the gap. They believe that students and their families base the decision to continue education on the assessment of the associated costs and benefits such that when the benefits outweigh the costs, the student chooses to continue. The perceived benefits are accentuated in instances where the father’s education is higher although the parental role declines as the student moves further on the educational ladder (Raftery & Hout, 1993: 57, 58). In a subsequent publication on a

comparative study of 25 countries using the MMI, Hout (2004) emphasised that the strength of the link between educational attainment and family background will be relative to the pervasiveness of post-secondary education, predicting that the said association will weaken as post-secondary education expands (p.3). Using father's and mother's education as well as the number of books in the respondent's home when growing up as indicators of family background, he concluded that "in nearly every nation, the effects of these aspects of family background exceed those of occupation and income" (p. 5).

The MMI has also been validated in the works of Shavit & Blossfeld (1993), Jonsson et al., 1996, Shavit & Westerbeek (1998) and nearly a decade ago, in a comparative study of 15 countries in Western and Eastern Europe, East Asia, the United States and Australia (Shavit et al., 2007a). Lucas (2001) holds that MMI, principally its fourth tenet, potentially is key to understanding the social background effects across different educational transitions. The MMI hypothesis has however been critiqued for failing to account for other forms of qualitative differentiation in education as well as curricular tracking; since educational choices extend beyond the decision to continue or drop out (Breen & Jonsson, 2000; Ayalon & Shavit, 2004 cited in Shavit et al., 2007b: 4; Lucas, 2001).

Erikson & Goldthorpe (2002: 42) further caution that mere educational expansion and reform should not be expected as very effective policy instruments that can equalise educational opportunities and level the playing field for individuals from all backgrounds. Complementary efforts aimed at reducing inequalities of conditions are also essential. Vukasović & Sarrico (2010) also believe that there is more to equality of access than just who gets in or does not get in; and on account of that, "the MMI hypothesis is not sufficient..." (p. 6).

Perhaps, the strongest critique of MMI is that given by Lucas (2009) after subjecting it to a formal analysis of what constitutes a viable scientific theory, which he proposed to "illuminate the social world" (p.462). Using three criteria – tautology, self-contradiction and evaluative infeasibility, he concludes; "...MMI asserts either a tautology or a contradiction and is, in any case, evaluatively infeasible. Ergo, MMI is not logically contingent, therefore it is not falsifiable, and thus MMI does not constitute a scientific theory" (p. 476).

4.1.2 Effectively Maintained Inequality (EMI)

While MMI emphasises inequalities emerging from education transitions, EMI goes a step further to explore the influence of curricular track mobility. Its focus transcends not only the backgrounds of the number of students transiting the lower levels (quantitative democratisation) but most importantly, the influence of socio-economic backgrounds on the curricular tracks of students (qualitative democratisation).

Effectively maintained inequality posits that socioeconomically advantaged actors secure for themselves and their children some degree of advantage wherever advantages are commonly possible. On the one hand, if quantitative differences are common, the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain quantitative advantage; on the other hand, if qualitative differences are common the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain qualitative advantage. (Lucas, 2001: 1652)

Thus, while MMI expects inequality of access to HE to decrease after the 'consumption' rate for students from advantaged origins has reached a point of saturation (universal enrolment), EMI contends that the advantaged would use their position (advantage) to secure a qualitatively better education at that particular level while still maintaining the quantitative advantage (ibid.).

Samuel Lucas, whose brain child is the theory of EMI which emerged to contest the claims of MMI notes the key difference between MMI and EMI.

...MMI states that policies to universalize a transition will reduce inequality, whereas EMI states that universalizing a transition may do nothing to reduce inequality because advantaged actors will discover or elaborate qualitative differences within the universalized transition and secure access to better quality. **And, if better quality confers advantage, then qualitative differences will effectively maintain inequality.** (Lucas, 2009: 500, emphasis added)

He further indicates the possibility of the advantaged in society exhibiting some gate-keeping behaviours that tend to exclude the academically qualified but socioeconomically disadvantaged persons from education, through individual and collective actions that preserve the structures that keep themselves or their wards in positions of advantage (p.506).

EMI has six postulates which includes, *inter alia*, the following:

- 1) Socioeconomically advantaged actors secure for themselves and their children some degree of advantage wherever advantages are commonly possible.
- 2) If quantitative differences are common the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain quantitative advantage.
- 3) If qualitative differences are common the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain qualitative advantage.

4) Postulates 2 and 3 could be true in that when a good is not universal, the socioeconomically advantaged use their advantages to secure that good. Once that good becomes nearly universal, however, the socioeconomically advantaged seek out whatever qualitative differences there are of that good, and use their advantages to secure quantitatively similar amounts of qualitatively better goods.

5) Alternatively, it is possible that even when quantitative differences are common qualitative differences are also important; if so, the socioeconomically advantaged will use their socioeconomic advantages to secure both quantitatively and qualitatively better outcomes. (ibid., p. 484-485).

Lucas (2001: 1681) further indicates that the effects of social background on education is manifest in at least two ways: (1) they condition who completes a certain level of education if that level is not nearly universal, and (2) in situations where the level of education is nearly universal, they determine the kind of education (quality and curricular track) an individual will receive. Either way, children from advantaged origins are better off in regard to upward social mobility.

Vukasović & Sarrico (2010: 6) support EMI asserting that the hypothesis is the most relevant in accounting for a phenomenon they refer to as *internal exclusion*, and for analysing tracking in education systems. Internal exclusion, according to the authors, emerges when one social group, though adequately represented in HE, are under-represented in more esteemed types of HE or fields. A study of HE expansion and equality of opportunity in Taiwan by Tsai & Shavit (2007) also lent credence to Lucas' EMI hypothesis. The three-cohort study (1946-55, 1956-66 and 1967-79) revealed that the junior colleges and four-year institutions became more socially distinct than they were for the earlier cohorts when relatively few people enrolled in a tertiary institution. They attribute the situation to class and ethnicity effects, adding that the expansion of tertiary education using the junior colleges as the channel resulted in white-collar families losing interest in that type of education; rather, preferring to send their wards to the universities. EMI equally resonates with Shavit and associates who point to the interconnectedness of educational expansion and differentiation. "As systems expand and quantitative educational inequalities between strata diminish, they are replaced by qualitative differentiation" (Shavit et al., 2007b: 16).

The broad availability of HE in American society, according to Berg (2010), has brought in its wake, an increasing pressure on the upper-classes to separate their children from the masses by enrolling them in the more selective universities; arguing that as the

competition for admission slots heats up, admission decisions then become a crucial tool for the maintenance or improvement of reputations.

4.1.3 Life Course Perspective (LCP)

Muller, Walter & Karle (1993) proposed the LCP in support of Mare (1980, 1981) and Hout's (1989) partial attribution of decline in origin effects in the sequence of educational transitions to differences in ability among children of different social classes who are able to endure earlier transitions of education. The authors connect the stronger effects of social origins on educational transitions to the natural tendency for younger children to rely on parental opinions and the social conditions at home and predict that:

With growing maturity, a person will be more able to decide on his or her own and will also be less dependent on parental resources, particularly if higher education is a more or less free good and subsidies are available to support the economically less advantaged in acquiring it. (Muller et al., 1993: 3)

The thesis of Muller and his companions, therefore, points to a waning or diminishing effect of socio-economic origins on HE access and equity, a position I find somewhat unidimensional. First-generation university students have often found HE access, participation and success a labyrinth; a phenomenon which triggers either the choice of a low-tier, less prestigious HE or the incidence of dropouts for those who enrol in universities. High SES students have on the contrary, leveraged their access and success with parental support and coaching, especially in instances where either one or both parents has attained a HE qualification. Pfeffer (2008: 545) identifies two of such parental resources which children from advantaged origins appropriate to their advantage at the higher levels of the educational transition – *content knowledge* and *strategic knowledge*.

Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum's (2003) view also directly negates LCP. "The need for guidance through the educational maze is by no means restricted to early stages of schooling, but even pertains to higher education where 'social know-how requirements' are an essential condition for student success" (cited in Pfeffer, 2008: 546). Similarly, Lane & Birds (2013) affirm that the impact of social origin does not decrease but rather increases at the later stages of the educational ladder. "Social class is thought to exert a 'dominance effect' on educational participation which increases in intensity; the higher the educational level, the greater proportion of individuals from advantaged backgrounds" (p. 158).

Lucas (2001) further argues that beyond the material resources children from advantaged origins possess, the parents are able to effectively bring their personal experiences to bear in the deployment of such resources, and by virtue of attainment of HE qualifications, such parents are also able to strategically guide their children in their secondary school journey in ways that make subsequent entry to HE a breeze. He believes that while parents from disadvantaged origins can at best, cheer their children on in their efforts to access HE, their counterparts from the higher social strata, with the HE experience under their belts, are able to add coaching to the cheering.

Obviously, the claim of Muller et al. (1993) that the effect of social class will wane in tuition-free and subsidised HE systems is quite weak. So long as the *numerus clausus* holds even in such systems, the children from the advantaged backgrounds will effectively maintain their hold on HE positions available until some drastic affirmative action measures are implemented to alter the composition of HE entrants. The increasing calls for the introduction of fees in tuition-free systems in recent times, for example, have often been defended on the grounds that high SES students are overrepresented in HE, a situation which makes using the taxes of the disadvantaged to subsidise the education of the rich a regressive undertaking.

Of all the three hypothesis on stratification (MMI, EMI, LCP), I find the EMI, particularly its postulate four, the most relevant analytical tool for reflecting on developments in the Ghanaian educational landscape. A number of interventions by the Government of Ghana such as the abolition of school fees and introduction of the Capitation Grant⁴⁰, free school uniforms and textbooks and the institution of a National School Feeding Programme in response to the UN's MDGs, universal primary enrolment (UPE) and Education for All (EFA), have resulted in a spike in enrolment at the basic level. At the primary level for example, GER has increased from 84% in 2002 to 107%⁴¹ in 2011 while the net enrolment ratio (NER) was 62% and 84% for the respective years. Both the GER and the

⁴⁰ The Capitation Grant was introduced in 2004 to help primary schools offset costs hitherto borne by parents as levies following the abolition of fees at the basic level. The grant currently at GHC 4.50 (US\$2.7) per pupil per annum is considered woefully inadequate to compensate the schools.

⁴¹ The GER takes into account all the pupils enrolled at that level of education irrespective of their age. The figure exceeds 100% because it includes children younger and older than the theoretical age group. The NER however takes into account only children whose ages fall within the theoretical age for that level.

NER outstrip the SSA average of 101% and 77% respectively (UIS, 2014)⁴². As expected, the increasing enrolment has resulted in deteriorating quality due to poor pupil-teacher ratios, overcrowding and other logistical constraints. 'Middle-class' families who can afford the expensive fees charged by the private providers have reacted by withdrawing their children from the fee-free public to the private schools to enhance their chances of excelling in the BECE and securing placements in the prestigious upper secondary schools where admissions are solely determined by scores from the BECE. Private basic schools in Ghana have traditionally outperformed the public despite the fact the latter is often staffed with relatively more trained teachers. Addae-Mensah (2000: 32) notes this development. "The present system...expects the child at JSS three in the public school, whose total body of knowledge is equivalent to his counterpart in class four or five in the private school, to compete on equal terms for places in the secondary schools". Thus, despite the universalisation of basic education in Ghana, high SES parents are effectively maintaining the inequality in educational attainments and upward social mobility through the power of the purse; and a quality primary education has often been used as the launch pad for achieving that. This vicious cycle for the disadvantaged has persisted for some time and its suppression seems distant as Addae-Mensah (2000) admits:

In the system of education that has operated in Ghana for several years, a good primary education has ensured entry into a good secondary education. A good secondary education has in turn assured a person the opportunity to proceed to the tertiary level ...and thence to a lucrative and highly respectable status in society. (p. 6)

Almost half a century ago, Hurd & Johnson (1967) had in fact observed this stratification in Ghanaian society. "Higher education in Ghana...functions largely to place the children of the elite in high occupational positions" (p. 77), which gives us a sense of the persistence of the phenomenon.

4.2 Parental Education

As noted earlier, the level of educational attainments of the parents directly impinge on the educational aspirations, choices, persistence and success of their offspring. How parents structure the home environment and relate to their children's academic achievement is deemed to be influenced by the amount of schooling the parents

⁴²

http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=121&IF_Language=eng&BR_Country=2880&BR_Region=40540

themselves receive. Parental education is thus seen as an important predictor of children's achievement (Davis-Kean, 2005: 294). Mothers who have had HE even among those in the low-income bracket, for example, have been found to have high expectations of the academic achievement of their children which subsequently converged with the actual achievement of the children, notably in reading and mathematics (ibid; Halle, Kurtz-Costes & Mahoney, 1997).

Relatedly, the social and psychological preparation of low SES students for HE has also been found to be conditioned by the lack of family knowledge of life in the university and the kind of emotional support HE-aged students receive from parents, counsellors and teachers. More emphatically, "a central component of the lack of preparation comes from parents who themselves have not had a college experience" (Berg, 2010: 25). In fact, Annette Lareau's seminal work – *Unequal Childhoods* notes how the differences between how low and high SES students are raised, directly impact on school performance; adding that a great deal of conversation in middle-class families tends to endow the children with greater vocabularies, a better understanding of the rules of interaction with social institutions and adults, as well as acquaintance with abstract concepts. She further argues that the activities of middle-class children—from soccer to school tutoring—are more organised imbuing them with performance and interactional skills which privileges them in school and the subsequent professional life (cited in Berg, 2010). It is further estimated that mothers with a HE degree on average spend 4.5 more hours each week engaging their children than their counterparts with upper secondary or less education, and that children with parents who are professionals would have acquired a stock of vocabulary 50% larger by age three than their counterparts from a working class background. Precisely, such children, arguably, would have heard 30 million more words than their peers from a lower SES (Greenstone, Looney, Patashnik & Yu, 2013: 9; Guryan, Hurst & Keaney, 2008; Hart & Risley, 1995).

The difference between having a parent with a HE attainment and one without, is assumed to be even more accentuated when students at the lower educational ladder go on long school vacations. "The impact of having college educated parents is perhaps greatest during the summer when the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students roughly doubles", which is due to the fact that such parents encourage the children to consistently use the library in addition to enrolling them in other holiday

educational programmes (ibid: 30). Thus, by the time school resumes from recess those children would have increased their stock of knowledge, widening the existing gap between their peers from less educated backgrounds.

Earlier research on inequality of opportunity for HE had documented that, at least in the American context, each year of parental education (father's or mother's) was equivalent to one-tenth of a year of HE for their child even after the effects of family income and the father's occupational status were taken into account; and accordingly, children who have both parents with a HE qualification receive on average one-half years more education than their counterparts whose parents only completed grade schools even if fathers of both groups had similar jobs and family incomes were similar. (Sewell, 1970: 798). Sewell's findings though quite outdated, are consistent with that of Aakvik, Salvanes & Vaage (2005: 393) whose analyses on the effects of aspects of family background— family income and parental education on the educational attainments of persons born between 1967 and 1972 in Norway—a system generally reputed as egalitarian in the distribution of educational opportunities, discovered that having a father with a university degree increased the probability that the child would also attain a university degree by more than 25 percentage points for both males and females

Quite recently, Givord & Goux's (2007) cohort study – *Mass and Class – Persisting Inequalities in Postsecondary Education in France* which spanned six birth cohorts from 1915-24 to 1965-74 also revealed that children from educated families are still privileged as far as HE opportunities are concerned; and that over a century, the gap between children whose fathers have completed level 3b (high level tertiary degree) compared to those with level 2c (upper secondary) remains unchanged while the handicap of children with a less-educated background (levels 1a [compulsory schooling] and 1c [lower vocational]) has seen a reduction but still remains significant. Cheung & Egerton (2007) also present similar findings from a two-cohort study in Britain using data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) for the 1958 cohort and the British Cohort Study (BCS) for that of 1970. Their analyses show that in regard to the effect of parental education on eligibility for HE, there has been little changes. Children from better educated families are more likely to be eligible for entry, predominantly in the competition for admission slots in the most prestigious HEIs. Although the authors also observed a reduction in the advantage of having a parent with full secondary education

attainment versus a lower than full secondary education in the cohort interactions, they argue that “[p]arental education is a predictor of success in higher education” (p.216) and further acknowledge the strong influence of parental education. “There is less change by cohort on the parental education variable than social class, presumably underlining the continued importance of parental education transmission” (p.217). Another four-cohort empirical study (1968-1980, 1958-1967, 1942-1957, 1960) conducted by Ishida (2007) on the Japanese context – *Educational Expansion and Inequality in Access to Higher Education* also revealed that as far as the relationship between parental education and the educational attainment of the offspring goes, the impact of the former is still strong without any diminishing trend, although HE has witnessed an expansion during the periods under review. The author therefore concludes that “the influence of parental education is substantial and persistent across cohorts. Sons and daughters of parents with low levels of education were disadvantaged at virtually all stages of educational advancement” (p. 85).

Although data restrictions preclude analysis similar to that of countries in the developed world presented above, as far as the Ghanaian context goes, parental education does exert some influence in the enrolment of children in school and the progression to the HE level; and this has long been acknowledged. “The factor of parental education may have a heightened importance in Ghana where the gap that divides the educated from the uneducated is wider than that which exists in industrial societies” (Hurd & Johnson, 1967: 62). The level of educational attainment of both the mother and father affects the child’s educational aspirations, choices, survival and success.

[T]he close connection between educational achievement and parental literacy and level of education suggests that the gap between the educated and the uneducated, straddled as it is in Ghana by the barrier of language, is crucial in explaining rigidities in social selection. A child coming from a home where the English language is spoken daily has an enormous advantage in school where English is the language of instruction. (ibid, 77, 78)

Fathers are by default the household heads both in rural and urban Ghana and mothers only assume that position in the event of divorce, single-parenting or the decease of the father. While the fathers are in the main, the decision-makers and controllers of the family wealth, the mothers’ influence is felt most in the upkeep of the home and the general well-being of the child. The father’s level of education, and of course, the occupational status therefore determines the weight attached to the education of the children and the kind of

investments that will be made. Whilst well-educated fathers will go to any length to ensure that their children enrol in the best of schools they can afford and advance to the highest level possible, it is a matter of chance for a child born to an uneducated or less-educated father. In the rural and forest cocoa-growing areas in Ghana, for example, a large family size is seen as a cheap source of labour and children may end up being 'employed' as farm helps, and in such cases, the education of the children is in jeopardy. The hope of having large acres of cocoa farms bequeathed to these children dims the aspiration of such children not only to enrol but to climb to the highest level possible on the educational ladder. The story is no different in the northern part of the country where cattle-rearing is predominant and in the coastal areas where the major occupation is fishing.

The less and uneducated mothers also tend to engage in small-scale subsistent farming and petty trading, particularly, in the rural areas. Mothers tend to socialise the children, especially the girl-child, along their occupational lines. Such children then spend the after-school hours assisting the parent in their trade rather than working on school assignments; and in some cases, absent themselves frequently from school which then snowballs into poor academic performance, low educational aspirations and dropouts. A study by Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah (2009) involving 89 school dropouts aged between 7-16 years in the Savelugu-Nanton, one of the most deprived districts in the Northern Region of Ghana confirms this position. The results showed that 82% of the children dropped out before they could reach the JSS (the 7th grade). That apart, child labour alone accounted for almost a third of the reasons for dropping out of school (p. 226). Halle et al. (1997) indeed confirm that parental actions such as the direct interaction with the child, and how the home environment is structured have a tendency to influence the development of the child in a number of ways. Kohn also argues that "whether consciously or not, parents tend to impart to their children lessons derived from the conditions of life of their own social class— and thus help prepare their children for a similar class position" (cited in Berg, 2010: 29). Even in established democracies like America, Berg (2010) alludes to some family members convincing promising female students that there was no point enrolling HE, and that they might either end up becoming pregnant, failing or returning to the world of work. This certainly complements Kohn's position and underlines the fact that poorly educated parents exhibit similar

attitudes towards the education of their children irrespective of the socio-political context.

Population census data from Ghana indicate that as late as 2010, 26.2% of male household heads and 38.4% of female household heads had never attended school, albeit a steep decline in the level of illiteracy in 1970—63.3% and 82.3% for the respective categories. Conversely, in 2010 9.2% male household heads had attained a tertiary education qualification (0.7% in 1970) compared to 4.2% and 0.1% for the female category for the respective period (GSS, 2013: 85).

In recent times, however, increased educational campaigns and sensitisation such as the send-your-girl-child-to-school initiative are impacting positively on raising the educational aspirations of children in the rural areas, and also encouraging parents to invest more in the education of their children. Allied to this is the rise of the ‘middle-class’ using the vehicle of HE which encourages low-income parents that their children can break the glass ceiling and end the intergenerational cycle of poverty if they attain a HE qualification – a prospect that seems blighted these days in the face of increasing graduate unemployment. Such children are often under pressure to perform since almost all the family resources are channelled to their education. But this situation is not unique to the Ghanaian context and that even in America, Berg (2010: 25) alleges that “low-income college students often feel a great deal of pressure to succeed”.

4.3 Family Income/Wealth

Is the HE playing field level for a student from a poor family in the same manner as one from a rich home? Where does family income or wealth sit in the HE opportunity equation? A recent World Bank study underscored the importance of economic resources in the educational inequality equation. Disaggregating inequality in education systems into four (parental education, gender, location and wealth), the report claims that poverty frequently accounts for 50% or more of the total inequality. Juxtaposing the relative weight of gender and poverty for example, it concludes that “differences in wealth [account] for most educational inequality.... Poverty rather than gender feeds overall educational inequalities in most of the world”. As a consequence, the study recommends that the global spotlight on inequality would mean that redistributive measures in the majority of contexts, should be concentrated on alleviating poverty (World Bank, 2011: 108). Duncan, Yeung, Brookes-Gunn & Smith (1998) had also noted the transcendence

of family income in education, arguing that “family economic conditions in early childhood have the greatest impact on achievement, especially among children in families with low incomes” (p.406). This position, highlights why pursuing affirmative action admission policies at the level of HE alone conceals the fundamental problem of deprivation in the larger society which when addressed would obviate the need for such palliative interventions at the HE level.

Berg (2010) cautions against underestimating the money factor in accessing HE education especially for low-income students who face the dual challenge of financing their education and the opportunity cost of leaving work for school, and its accompanying loss of income for the students themselves; and in the case of low-income students, the financial support given to the family from their personal earnings. In point of fact, he substantiates his claim noting that in 2004 for example, 49.6% of low-income students in America enrolled in HE in the academic year following the high school graduation year compared to 79.3% of those from the high-income families (p.62). Earlier research in the same context, had found that a high SES student had almost 4 to 1 advantage in access to HE, 6 to 1 in graduation from same and a 9 to 1 advantage in progressing to graduate education or professional studies relative to the student from a low SES. Thus, “the lower the SES group, the more limited the opportunities at each higher level of education”. In the same vein, a US\$ 1,000 increase in the income of a family, at the time, was found to increase the educational attainment of the child by .08 of a year on average (Sewell, 1970: 795, 798).

The situation in Ireland revealed a similar and even more distressing pattern; 97% of students from the highest income group enrolled in HE as opposed to 21% from the lowest income group. “For families with little or no disposable income, the financial costs of continuing in education represent a real and substantial obstacle to participation in higher education” (Department for Education and Science, 2003: 24). The ever increasing gap between the financial support available for HE from governmental and allied sources and the actual cost of accessing and participating in HE is also fingered as the cause of the multiplicity of problems impacting the enrolment of low-income students. “...This gap deters disadvantaged students from planning to go to college, stops those with the necessary points from accepting places, leads to significant non-completion and requires students to work excessive part-time hours to sustain themselves in education” (ibid.).

I draw on two real life cases in Ghana to illustrate the point above regarding the negative impact of family income on otherwise brilliant and well-qualified students in their aspiration for and enrolment in HE.

Isaac Cofie, the son of a fisherman from a coastal village in the Central Region of Ghana who graduated from the Methodist Senior High School—a moderately endowed SHS, had outstanding results in the 2013 WASSCE, the school-leaving and matriculation examination for enrolment in HEIs. Of the seven subjects Isaac sat for, he obtained Grade A1 (excellent) in six of them. In fact, his ‘worst’ grade was B3 (Good) in English Language; although he had on a number of occasions been sent out of school for non-payment of fees. A poor fishing season meant that the ‘over-qualified’ Isaac stayed home with no hope of furthering his studies to the level of HE since his father could not even afford the application form for admission to a public university let alone finance a four-year university education. Isaac was compelled by these circumstances to take up a teaching appointment in a basic school in Apam, a few kilometres from his hometown on a monthly salary of GHC 50 (US\$18)⁴³ out of which he spends GHC 1 everyday to commute to work⁴⁴. Interestingly, the cost of undergraduate application form to the University of Ghana for the 2014/15 academic year was GHC 130, meaning that were he to use all his salary to purchase a form, he would have to save for almost three months to be able to so. When the news of Isaac’s plight broke following an appeal by the father to the Assemblyman⁴⁵ for his community for assistance, it attracted a lot of sympathies and philanthropists culminating in Ashesi University College (a fledgling prestigious private university in Ghana), offering him an admission with full scholarship valued at GHC 72,000 (US\$ 25,876), as a Mastercard Foundation Scholar with the option of pursuing a degree of his choice in Business Management, Management Information System or Computer Science; thus, reigniting his dream of becoming a banker⁴⁶. But for Ashesi’s timely intervention, such a brilliant brain would have been allowed to ‘rot in the drain’.

⁴³ Based on exchange rates for April 23, 2014. GHC 1=USD 0.359

⁴⁴ <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2014/March-25th/poverty-wasting-away-shs-graduate-with-7as.php>

⁴⁵ The Assemblyman/woman represents his or her community in the district assemblies at the local government level, and is expected to champion the general welfare and the developmental needs of their constituents. They are either elected by their communities or appointed by the government.

⁴⁶ <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2014/April-7th/brilliant-but-needy-isaac-coffie-secures-gh-72000-ashesi-university-scholarship.php>

Isaac's case is not exceptional. Olivia Agbenyeke from Agboghloshie, a slum in Accra — Ghana's capital has had an educational history dotted with academic brilliance despite all the social vices peculiar to that slum— teenage pregnancy, prostitution, armed robbery, drug addiction. Born to a father who operates a drinking spot (pub) in the slum, the proceeds from which he feeds his family, Olivia achieved excellent results in the BECE, obtaining Grade 1(highest) in seven of the ten subjects and Grade 2 in the remaining despite working as a bartender in his father's business after school hours till 12 midnight. Although the results would have qualified her for admission into any of her dream elite SHS like the Wesley Girls High School and the Holy Child School to pursue a programme in Science, her father had to manage her expectations and eventually got her admitted to a less prestigious school (Keta SHS) for obvious reasons. She again braved all odds at the upper secondary level, and like Isaac Cofie obtained seven Grade A1's out of the eight subjects she sat for in the 2012 WASSCE. Her weakest grade was B2 in Biology. Although, she dreams of becoming a medical doctor and a neurosurgeon at that, for which she duly qualified for admission, such a hope already risks being blighted. Olivia could not enrol in the 2012/13 academic year because the father's business was not in the best of shape and as a consequence, he could not afford the application form for admission to the university. In the interim, Olivia had taken up a teaching job and although the father has managed to purchase application forms for three public universities (UG, KNUST and University for Development Studies [UDS]), she is being convinced by the father to abandon the idea of pursuing a programme in Medicine for one in the humanities because he does not have the wherewithal to support her if she settles for the former⁴⁷.

Both Olivia and Isaac's case throw up pertinent issues confronting low-income students in their quest for HE and upward social mobility. Olivia's father, for example, succeeded in persuading her daughter not to enrol in a prestigious upper secondary school, although she was qualified for admission and is again influencing her decision to pursue Medicine for a less prestigious programme in the humanities. It reinforces the argument that when low-income students elect to enrol in HE, they are often tracked into less esteemed programmes. While the father was being realistic about his financial strength, his actions to a large extent, would impact on the self-esteem of her daughter with its attendant consequences for Olivia's HE success and life chances. Berg (2010) holds a similar view

⁴⁷ <http://graphic.com.gh/General-News/olivia-the-glitter-in-the-agboghloshie-slum.html>

on this point: “Poor students have adjustment problems in college primarily because of a lack of family and personal wealth. This lack of affluence affects their self-image and career goals from a very young age” (p. 75). It further challenges the popular notion that low SES students tend to have low aspirations for further education and career destinations. The fact of Isaac and Olivia’s poor social, cultural and economic capital did not deter them from aspiring and studying to obtain the grades that would qualify them for admission into HE programmes leading to their respective career destinations - banker and medical practitioner. Indeed, Bibby & Peil’s (1974) earlier research on Ghana, is antithetical to the widely held notion that children born to uneducated or less educated parents are underachievers relative to their counterparts from highly educated homes as the cases of Isaac and Olivia exemplify.

The fact that pupils with illiterate or relatively uneducated parents are able to do as well as those with educational and linguistic advantages at home implies that bright children are able to overcome their origins and get what they need at school, especially if they manage to get into one of the better schools. (p.414)

Again, the two cases do point to a dissatisfaction of the two fathers with the status quo and a desire to ensure that their children are ‘empowered’ to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty. In other words, there is an evidence of the unwillingness of the parents to reproduce their kind, although they are held back by poverty. Bibby & Peil (1974) had observed that many uneducated Ghanaian parents have high educational ambitions for their wards but are often restrained by their lack of knowledge or the resources to prosecute that agenda. Clearly, the field of parental educational investments are unequal. As Duncan et al. (1998) rightly point out “entry into college is facilitated if parental income during adolescence is high” (p. 420). Greenstone et al. (2013: 1) also cogently elaborate that view.

Investments in education and skills, which are factors that increasingly determine outcomes in the job market, are becoming more stratified by family income. As income inequality has increased, wealthier parents are able to invest more in their children’s education and enrichment, increasing the already sizable difference in investment from those at the other end of the earnings distribution.

4.4 Gender

The gender variable is of fundamental importance in gauging the ‘democratisation’ or otherwise of HE opportunities in any given context. In most parts of the world today, female enrolment in HE has outstripped male enrolment putting the latter at ‘risk’.

Female enrolment in tertiary education globally, grew by more than a factor of seven between 1970 and 2008 from (10.8 million to 80.9 million) while that of males saw a fourfold increase (World Bank, 2011: 108). A fifteen-country comparative study of social stratification in higher education further confirms the female dominance in HE (with the exception of Germany, South Korea and Taiwan); indicating that the new pattern of male disadvantage (female advantage) began in the second half of the twentieth century. It further notes that women's advantage was more noticeable in HE systems in which expansion was very rapid; be they unitary, binary or diversified - an indication of the fact that women took more advantage of the expansion than their male counterparts. The study which did not find any systematic relationship between gender inequality in HE and private funding concludes that "overall there is a fairly uniform pattern of women's increasing participation in higher education, closing the gap, and then often coming to outperform men in higher education enrolment" (Shavit et al. 2007a: 27).

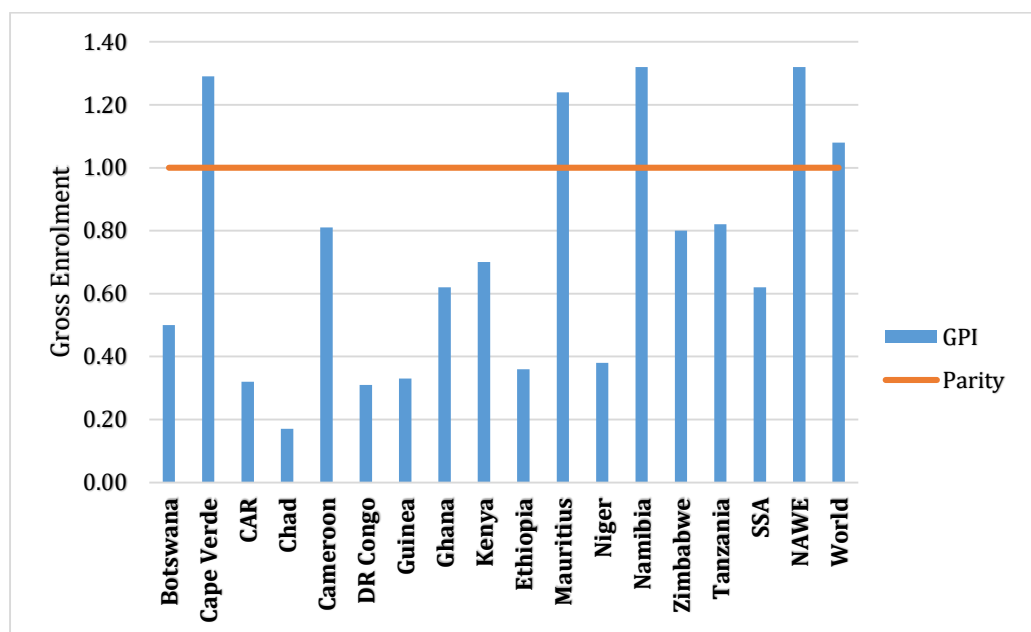
Developments in most SSA countries including Ghana, however, largely point to a maintenance of the *status quo* as far as the female enrolment advantage is concerned. As the gender parity index (GPI)⁴⁸ in Figure 3 illustrates, only three countries in SSA (Cape Verde, Mauritius and Namibia) have attained parity for the countries for which data are available.

The SSA average of 0.62 is in fact the lowest for all the regions of the world and represents almost half of the global average of 1.08 while that of North America and Western Europe (1.32)—the highest in the world— is more than double the average GPI for SSA (UIS, 2012b: 128). Nonetheless, the current rate for SSA needs further contextualisation. It represents a significant increase over the period between 1970 and 1990 which ranged from 0.45 and 0.50 (UIS, 2010: 3). Both the global and NAWWE indices point to the dominance of females in HE today while there is a gross under-representation of same in SSA as the case of Chad exemplifies. It is however refreshing to note that the GPI for Namibia is on a par with the average for NAWWE. It must also be emphasised that the dominance of females in HE in the few SSA countries is not necessarily indicative of the empowerment of females but one that can be attributed to a happenstance and certain

⁴⁸ The GPI is the ratio of female-male enrolment. A GPI of 1 indicates parity between the sexes, whilst a GPI greater than 1 shows the dominance of one of the sexes. In all the cases presented in Figure 3 with indices above 1, female enrolment in the respective countries has outpaced male enrolment.

socio-cultural norms. In Lesotho for instance, women have higher attainment across the entire educational spectrum, a phenomenon largely attributable to the so-called “herder tradition” where boys are oriented towards tending livestock and girls are sent to school (UIS, 2011: 36).

Figure 3: Tertiary Enrolment in Select SSA Countries by Gender, 2010

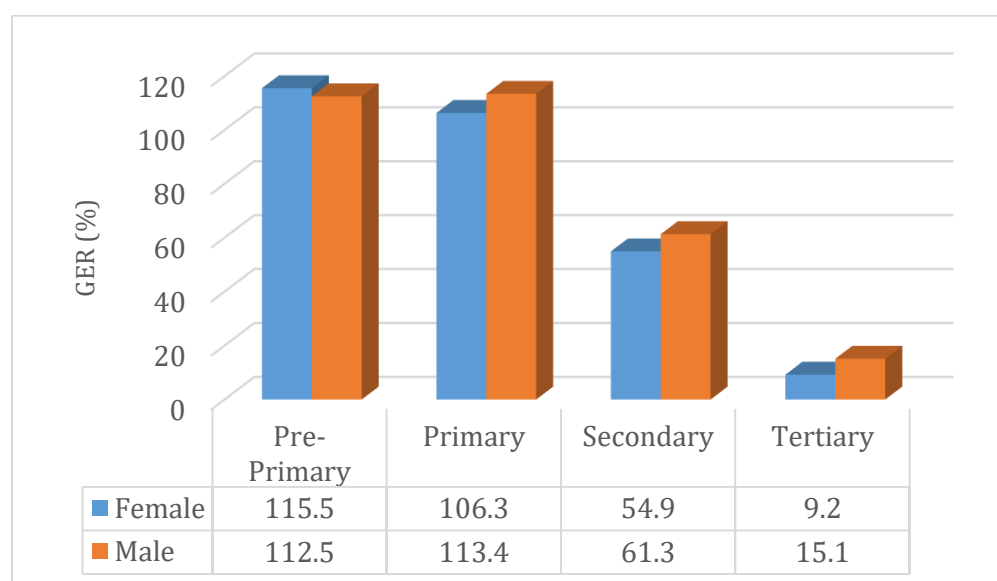


Notes: CAR=Central African Republic, SSA= Sub-Saharan Africa, NAW= North America & Western Europe. Data for 2010 or latest year available.

Source: Author’s construct based on Table 8, Global Education Digest, 2012 (p. 128).

A rather interesting pattern in the enrolment of females in education in SSA in general and especially in Ghana, is that they (females) are often at the same level of enrolment with the males at the lower levels, and in some cases outnumber them, but in the process of time lose out to the male counterparts at the higher rungs of the educational ladder (See Figure 4). This apparent ‘thinning-out’ of the female gender is a complex issue occasioned by a host of social, cultural and economic factors, and as Morley & Lugg (2009: 41) admit, “gender is not a solitary social construct”. In Ghana, a female child has traditionally been regarded as inferior and has often played a second fiddle to the male counterpart in virtually all matters. The phenomenon of ‘son preference’ and its associated sex-selection prevalent in South-East Asia particularly China, Republic of Korea and India (World Bank, 2006) is also real in Ghana, though subdued.

Figure 4: Enrolment in Ghana by Gender, 2012



Source: Author based on UIS, 2014 data.

The average couple would want to have a male as a first child failure of which leads to disappointment not only for the father, but in some cases even the mother. In some Akan (the largest ethnic group) communities, some might even go the extent, at the announcement of the birth of a child, to ask *owo abowa anaa nyimpa?* to wit, did she give birth to an ‘animal’ (girl) or human being (boy)? In traditional family gatherings and meetings, the male child is giving pre-eminence and a voice even if an older female sibling is present. Thus, the internalisation of inferiority on the part of the female begins right from the cradle. In poor and large families, who cannot afford the costs of educating all the children to the highest level possible, boys are often the favourites in the selection even in instances where the girl-child has demonstrated exceptional academic abilities relative to that of the boy. This is often informed by two reasons; the fear of the girl getting pregnant and dropping out of school mid-way, in which case she would have ‘wasted’ the scarce family resources; and further, the hope of the girl getting married to a man who will then be responsible for her upkeep. These postulations are based on my personal experiences and familiarity with the context, but they are issues so widespread and familiar that whoever knows the Ghanaian and the African contexts very well cannot refute. I must also add that these practises are waning as a result of civilisation and increasing campaigns for the education of the girl-child and for gender equality and equity.

Shabaya & Konadu-Agyemang (2004) attribute the low enrolment of girls across all the levels of the educational system in Ghana, despite the country's majority female population – especially the post-1985 period, to the decline in the economic fortunes of the country in the 1970s and 1980s and its attendant high cost of living that forced a good number of children out of school to become what they term as “supplementary breadwinners for their families” (p. 403). They also acknowledge the devastating effect the economic hardships coupled with the negative attitudes towards the female gender has had on their education:

The introduction of user-pay into Ghana's educational system under the IMF/World Bank sponsored economic restructuring made it even more difficult for some parents to pay for their children's education, and **if they were constrained to choose between educating a son and a daughter, the former was preferred due to entrenched attitudes that place higher premium on male education.** Thus entrenched attitudes about female education, combined with economic hardships, worked against the enrollment and continuation of girls in school. (ibid., emphasis added)

The ‘gendering’ of domestic chores in Ghana as in other SSA countries, further disadvantages the girl-child. The fifth round of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) for instance, revealed that as far as domestic chores are concerned females outranked the males in respect of fetching firewood and water, washing of clothes and dishes, cooking and childcare. The males only dominate slightly in the running of errands for the home. For those aged seven years and older, 71.9% of females cook and spend on average 82 minutes a day on cooking compared to 17.7% and 46 minutes, respectively, for the males. The average female also dedicates 129 minutes a day to childcare compared to 67 minutes for the male counterpart. A more microscopic view reveals that among children of upper secondary age (15-19 years), girls spend on average 106 minutes a day on caring for children (younger siblings) alone while boys commit 60 minutes to that activity (GSS, 2008: 47, 49). This implies that girls have relatively little time at their disposal even when they are enrolled in school, and on account of that, can commit a small amount of time to after-school personal studies and assignments. In essence, as Godwyll (2008) argues in a study to ascertain failure among boys and girls in schools in Ghana, “[t]he socially assigned roles of males and females, coupled with certain cultural practices, have resulted in different forms of inequality between males and females” (cited in Annin, 2009: 64).

The gender divide is in fact a phenomenon that extends beyond the home to schools and tend to impact on curricular tracks in HE education and later to the world of work (as the

interviews for this study would reveal). In the Ghanaian setting, for example, it is generally considered effeminate for a male to cook or babysit and those who engage in these and related activities are ridiculed and stigmatised. Among the Fantes such an individual would be nicknamed *Kojo Basia*⁴⁹; hence the name-calling and stigmatisation make most males shun these 'feminine roles', and those who engage in them might choose to do so privately. Similarly, certain roles are also deemed as 'no-go areas' for the females. Activities like playing football, biking, driving a car etc. are traditionally, seen as male domains and females who are fond of operating in such male-dominated domains might be suspected to be witches or at best be called *obaa dindin* which literally means a difficult girl/woman. Although these negative perceptions are increasingly being eroded, vestiges of them still remain especially among the uneducated rural folks.

In the school setting, the environment often works against the progression and success of girls. It is perfectly normal for a boy to outperform a girl in assignments and examinations but a girl who exhibits exceptional academic abilities risks being cowed and bullied by their male counterparts, branded a witch and isolated by her classmates. The situation is compounded in schools with few or no female teachers to serve as role models and counsellors for girls. These behaviours are not only confined to the lower levels of education but are patently prevalent in HEIs; a fact Manuh et al. (2007) admit. "The university is a gendered environment dominated by males, where female students, staff and faculty often experience hostile and sexually threatening behaviour, as well as intellectual belittling and undervaluation" (p.148, 149). The authors' opinion is that very little has been done by institutions of higher learning to counteract violence against women on campuses such as sexual harassment and other misogynistic behaviours. They lament the non-existence of Equal Opportunity units, sexual violence policies and grievance procedures in any of the institutions, as well as the levity with which complaints of such nature are treated by the authorities. They scathingly conclude that "[j]udging by their record, Ghanaian public universities are extremely old-fashioned in their disregard for gender equity" (ibid: 130).

4.5 Geographical Location

This section sheds light on how an individual's physical location; be it the place of birth or residence contributes to stratification in opportunities for HE. In other words, does an

⁴⁹ *Kojo* is a name given to a male born on Tuesday among the Akans while *Basia* means female.

individual's place of origin or residence facilitates or diminishes their opportunities to access HE? Should being born in a city or village determine who gets an admission slot in a HEI? There is no denying the fact that urban and rural dwellers have differential access to basic infrastructure that enhances the quality of life. The former tend to possess more geographic capital than the latter as a result of better access to infrastructure and public services. In the developing world, there is often a yawning gap between the availability and the quality of basic facilities like schools, motorable roads and water in the urban and rural areas which often occasion the rural-urban drift. While schools in urban areas, for example, are well-resourced, children in the rural areas enrol in schools barely staffed with trained teachers, with ill-equipped with the requisite teaching and learning materials and dilapidated structures, and commute long distances from home to school. Physical geographic location is one of the pre-determined circumstances an individual starts life with. These circumstances affect an individual's life chances in two ways – they determine the endowments they start life with as well as how they interact with and are treated by institutions of the state (World Bank, 2006). Ironically, rural students would be required to sit for the same exam and compete with their urban counterparts on equal footing as they progress on the educational ladder. Spatial inequalities in access to and equity in HE, though, is not a phenomenon confined to developing countries. Manifestations can still be found in the developed world.

A report by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) on the participation of young people (18-19 years) in HE by geographical area between 1994 and 2004, for instance, showed marked regional differences in participation. Areas like the North East had not only seen little growth in participation, but had fallen further behind high participation areas like London and the South East; and inequalities have increased. A closer look revealed that in some constituencies only one in 10 young people enter HE whereas in others more than half enrol. The report adds that

...there are broad and deep divisions in the chances of going into HE according to where you live. Young people living in the most advantaged 20 per cent of areas are five to six times more likely to enter higher education than those living in the least advantaged 20 per cent of areas. (HEFCE, 2005: 10, 11)

At the local level, the study further revealed that “many cities and towns are educationally divided, containing both neighbourhoods where almost no one goes to university and neighbourhoods where two out of three or more will enter HE”. After the detailed

analyses of the participation of young people by geographical location the report concludes;

there is a deep division in the chances of young people going to university according to where they live, and that this inequality in young participation has not changed substantially over the period covered by this work.... High and low participation areas are found all over the country, often in close proximity. (ibid: 11)

Corver & Dorling (2005) also believe that geographical inequalities in access to HE is not a phenomenon that operates in isolation, but one reflecting the broader geographical inequalities in society, schools, the home environments as well as the aspirations of the young people themselves and that of their parents. While they welcome affirmative action at the application stage to even the distribution of HE opportunities, they also contend that such measures “are not going to have any material impact on the deep participation inequalities” (p. 3). The English case actually presents an interesting angle for reflections on developments in Ghana by virtue of the colonial ties between the two countries and the latter’s adoption of the educational system of the former, ‘lock, stock and barrel’ even after independence in 1957.

Spatial inequalities in education in Ghana, generally, are inextricably linked to the country’s colonial history, a situation which is still persistent. Education in Ghana (then Gold Coast) began in the coastal and southern part of the country with the advent of the European merchants in the 16th century. The schools at the time were held in forts and castles and primarily catered to the children of the merchants emerging out of inter-tribal marriages with the indigenes— the mulattos. By the 19th century, education in the country was still primarily a southern affair, basically in the hands of the European missionaries who saw education as instrumental in the propagation of the gospel and Christianity (see Adu-Agyem & Osei-Poku, 2012; McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975).

The Northern Territories⁵⁰ at the time had very little to offer in terms of mineral resources and cash crops; and by that token, offered very little impetus for infrastructural development and social services by the British Colonial Government. For example, roads and railway lines were constructed to link the resource-rich areas predominantly Ashanti to the coastal areas, ostensibly, to facilitate their transportation and subsequent export

⁵⁰ The area is presently, home to the three regions (Northern, Upper East and Upper West).

abroad as raw materials for the industries. Consequently, one could hardly sight a railway line in the northern part of the country.

The first government school in the Northern Territories was established in 1909 in Tamale, and until 1912 when another was established in Gambaga, it remained the only school in the area, and as late as independence in 1957, the entire area could boast of only one university graduate (Thomas, 1974). Roger Thomas blames the colonial administration for the lopsided development of education in Ghana citing economic, governance (indirect rule) and myopic considerations:

In the absence of profound economic pressures, the major potential force for social change became the activities of missionaries in proselytism and education, and the government's own provision for education. **Throughout the period under consideration [1906-1940], however, the government kept a tight rein on educational development and general missionary activity in an endeavor to maintain the power of traditional institutions. This policy meant that the protectorate suffered, as it has continued to suffer, from serious educational disadvantages compared with Ashanti and the Colony to the south....** The government failed to foresee the possibility that the protectorate would become part of a national unit involving the need for the development of a national educated group whose members could operate in any part of the country. (ibid: 427-428, emphasis added)

Table 2: Enrolment in the Gold Coast by Area and Gender, 1919

Area/Colony	Govt. Schools	Govt-Assisted Mission Schs.	Pupils	
			Boys	Girls
Eastern Province	5	114	12,130	2,877
Central Province	3	42	5,723	1,107
Western Province	3	19	2,370	321
Ashanti	4	19	2,292	287
Northern Territories	4	-	203	8

Source: Adapted from Thomas, 1974: 439

Table 2 clearly indicates the extent to which access to education in the Gold Coast was geographically stratified both in provision and participation. The Eastern Province – now home to the Greater Accra and Eastern Regions (see Appendix 1) had until 1919 a total

of 119 schools enrolling approximately 15,000 pupils whereas the Northern Territories had a total of four schools with just 238 pupils during the same period. Across the provinces girls were also grossly under-represented in education. Even in the highest participation area (Eastern), the enrolment of boys exceeded that of girls by fourfold. In the Northern Territories girls were twenty-five times less likely to be in school than boys.

Cynicism on the part of the indigenes, particularly the traditional rulers, and the colonial administration further accounted for the delay in the development of education in the Northern Territories. The reluctance of the traditional rulers towards the formal education of the children in the area stemmed from the fear of alienation from the customs and traditions of the land. Consequently, the chiefs for example, were more comfortable sending a slave to school than a near kinsman as alleged by Thomas (1974: 458):

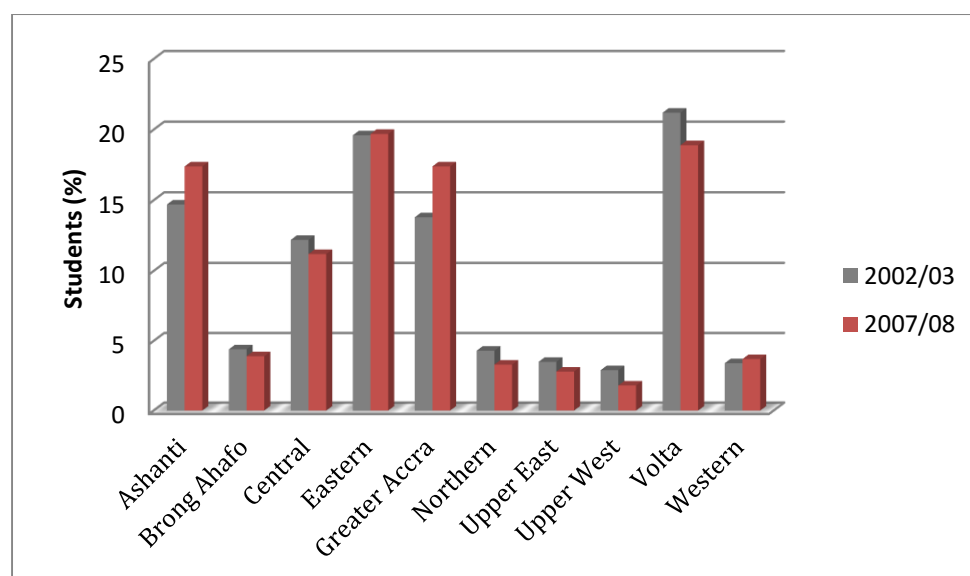
They [chiefs] were sending away a child at an age when the most important part of his real education was about to begin. He disappeared and was forgotten. If he ever returned, which he seldom did, he probably adopted a superior attitude to everybody young or old, was rude to his parents or not amenable to the disciplines of those in authority. He was not a very good advertisement, in fact, of the benefits of civilised education in comparison with the home product. If the boy ever attained any proficiency he was lost for ever to his home circle, which probably did not cause it too much heartburning.

The chiefs' distrust and negative attitude towards formal education however changed as they latter took on some supervisory roles in the provision of education and in some cases, some of them availed themselves to be taught alongside the children (ibid.). The cynicism on the part of the colonial administration was one borne out of concerns about lack of employment for the school graduates; and like the chiefs, alienation. The views expressed by the provincial commissioner to the Northern Territories at the time (1912) as captured by Thomas (1974) illustrate this position:

To give these primitive children a more advanced education would be a doubtful blessing at present. It might tend to make them discontented with their lot. Is our population so large at present that we can afford to educate natives for work on the Coast? On the other hand, if they, on leaving School, return to their families with advanced education, will this make for peace in the household? Will these educated youths go back to work on the farms?...**For the time being we can only afford to go very gently with education, both book and technical** in my opinion. (p. 434, emphasis added)

Spatial inequalities in the distribution of HE opportunities in Ghana still linger, and a North-South divide is clearly visible. A survey of 1,500 students in the country's five oldest public universities did indicate that 75% of the students were indigenes of five of the ten regions (Eastern, Ashanti, Volta, Central and Greater Accra) – all in the south. 70% of the students were also found to be residents of only three regions (Ashanti, Greater Accra and Eastern), which incidentally, have the highest population densities (Manuh et al. 2007; Anyan, 2011). The evidence further point to the fact that the historically privileged regions continue to extend their domination at the expense of the under-represented regions. At UG—Ghana's premier and largest university— for instance, the five regions increased their share of undergraduate students from 82% in the 2002/03 academic year to 85% in 2007/08 whilst the other five regions (Brong Ahafo, Western, Northern, Upper East and Upper West) saw their share dip from 18% to 15% respectively (Anyan, 2011: 156). Figure 5 is illustrative of this argument.

Figure 5: Regions of Origin of Undergraduate Students at UG, 2002/03 and 2007/08



Source: *ibid.*

In essence, this chapter has demonstrated that a number of factors interact and conspire in regard to stratification in the distribution of HE opportunities; and for that matter, treating any of these factors as the sole determinant of who gets the opportunity to pursue HE or otherwise—as a good amount of literature on the subject has sought to portray—would amount to a partial diagnosis, understanding and treatment of the phenomenon. The analyses in Chapter Six lend more credibility to this position.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This section highlights the philosophical assumptions with which the researcher approached the study, the research strategy and design, the methods used for the data collection and their subsequent analyses and interpretations.

5.1 Philosophical Paradigms

The philosophical worldview or paradigm with which the study was approached could best be described as pragmatic; integrating elements of both the transformative and the constructivist paradigms. Pragmatism primarily concerns itself with finding solutions to research problems, and by so doing, adopting a “what works” approach to the study. Thus, it enables the researcher to employ “all approaches available to understand the problem” rather than being occupied by methods. It is therefore regarded as the philosophical foundation for studies that employ mixed methods (Creswell, 2014: 10; Patton, 1990, Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Some key tenets of the pragmatic paradigm include; (1) non-commitment to any single philosophy or reality; (2) the freedom to choose research methods, techniques and procedures best suited to the researcher’s need and purposes; (3) varied approaches for data collection and analysis; (4) a belief in a world both independent of, but also lodged in the mind; and (5) a theoretical lens reflective of political aims and social justice (Creswell, 2014: 11; Cherryholmes 1992; Morgan, 2007).

The pragmatic philosophical orientation therefore shaped the present study in a number of ways. It influenced the ‘construction’ and use of multiple conceptual frameworks by the researcher to guide the research. The most productive conceptual framework, according to Maxwell (2004:35), is that which is geared towards integrating different approaches and lines of investigation or theories that no one had previously connected. Put better, “the conceptual framework... is something that is *constructed*, not found. It incorporates pieces that are borrowed from elsewhere, but the structure, the overall coherence is something that *you* build, not something that exists ready-made” (ibid., emphasis in original).

Besides, the study also required the adoption of a multi-level unit of analysis – micro (students and graduates), meso (HEI officials), macro (policy-makers). Although the micro was the main focus, it became necessary, for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena, to solicit and gauge the views of other actors from the two levels (meso

and macro) in order to ascertain how the various actors construct the reality. The kind of interactions that occur in these arenas were equally of interest. The multidisciplinary nature of the study, the use of multiple data sources and methods were all informed by the researcher's worldview. Creswell (2014), therefore concludes that as far as the mixed method researcher is concerned, "pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis" (p. 15).

Specifically, the researcher's partial ontological leaning on the transformative paradigm chimes with the philosophical underpinnings in research areas such as this. According to Mertens (2010), the transformative paradigm functions as an "umbrella for research theories and approaches that place priority on social justice and human rights", indicating that it is of relevance to issues of discrimination and oppression in all its manifestations such as that of ethnicity and race, gender, poverty, disability, immigrant status and the "multitude of other characteristics that are associated with less access to social justice" (p. 473). Its application further extends to studies that investigate the power structures that preserve social inequities (p. 474). The transformative paradigm was hitherto referred to as *emancipatory* (Mertens, 2009; Cohen et al., 2005), but Mertens (2009: 2) rechristened it as the *transformative*, ostensibly, to emphasise that the researcher has an agency role in the transformation of society with the research being conducted, and not merely to seek emancipation for others—the oppressed and powerless.

The transformative paradigm is purported to have emerged in response to the constructivist, which despite its strength of trying to understand the phenomenon under study from the participants' viewpoints, is criticised for not doing enough in regard to advocacy, to push for an agenda that will change the circumstances of the marginalised (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010).

Apparently, the integration of both the constructivist and transformative paradigms (pragmatic) ensured that the participants, particularly the students at the margins, were not only given a voice and heard, but also an agenda to make the distribution of HE opportunities more equitable for the historically underserved but majority groups in the Ghanaian society, such as students from the rural areas and schools, those with disabilities and from very poor income groups was put forward. The constructivist

paradigm is also cognisant of the fact that the background of the researcher impacts the interpretation they bring to the phenomenon under study, hence, the “researchers’ own accounts of the social world are constructions” (Creswell, 2014; Bryman, 2012: 33). The use of what Kelle (2001:13) calls “heuristic of common sense knowledge” both in aspects of the literature review, particularly in Chapter Four, and also in the interpretation of the results in Chapter Six, could be attributed to that, since the research context was familiar to the researcher.

5.2 Research Strategy

The qualitative methodology was principally adopted for the research. The approach very much supported the research questions and also the researcher’s drive to give the participants a voice. According to Bryman (2012: 36), the qualitative research strategy emphasises words both in the collection and analysis of data as opposed to quantification. It was therefore seen as the logical choice for seeking the views and experiences of the participants in relation to the phenomena under study. The approach further aligned with the constructivist-transformative ontological orientation, the case study design and the interpretivist epistemological assumption. Qualitative approaches are deemed to give more allowance for innovation, creativity and more literary-style reporting and also tend to work well in frameworks designed by the researcher. It has also been identified as lending a strong support for pursuing topics of interest in transformative research (Creswell, 2014).

Savenye & Robinson (2005: 68) note this as far as the qualitative approach is concerned: “The goal is to yield insight into human activities and opinions from the perspectives of the participants”. The collection and analysis of quantitative data served the dual purposes of supplementing and complementing the qualitative data for a better understanding, and appreciation of the issues under study and to fully answer the research questions. As a consequence, the study employed more than one research strategy, and particularly so, if Bryman’s (2008, 2012) definition of the quantitative strategy as one emphasising quantification in data collection and analysis is anything to go by. However, the greater weight was given to the qualitative data. It has been argued that the water-tight compartmentalisation and strict separation of qualitative and quantitative research is itself a problematic exercise, since the former, depending on the approach and methods employed, sometimes does use numbers and statistics (Savenye

& Robinson, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Bryman, 2012, Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2005). Observing the trends in HE research, Savenye & Robinson (2005) therefore conclude that: “There is no one ‘correct’ research approach or methodology. Research questions should guide decisions about approaches, paradigms, and methods...posing qualitative research as being opposite from quantitative research is not conducive to conducting good research” (p.69). Flyvbjerg (2006) similarly denounces the qualitative-quantitative divide as “spurious” and contend that

...good social science is opposed to an either/or and stands for a both/and on the question of qualitative versus quantitative methods. Good social science is problem driven and not methodology driven in the sense that it employs those methods that for a given problematic [*sic*], best help answer the research questions at hand. (p.242)

These and other practical considerations, therefore, underlined the pragmatic, what-works approach to this study.

5.3 Emergent Research Design

The disability component of the study was in fact, an afterthought. The researcher’s interest in the subject matter was aroused during the data collection at the research site. Despite it being a happenstance, it undoubtedly proved to be a significant aspect of the study. It only emphasised the flexible design of qualitative studies in particular, the indeterminate nature of research in general, as well as the pragmatic approach to the study. According to Creswell (2014), one of the characteristics of qualitative research is its “emergent design”, noting that “the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (p. 186).

At the outset of the study, the researcher had envisaged conducting a survey as part of the primary data collection. The idea was shelved in the process of time for three main reasons. Firstly, such an approach was going to significantly impact the researcher’s motivation to give the participants, especially those from the marginalised groups a voice; and the rich narratives that eventually emerged from the semi-structured interviews would have largely, been lost. Secondly, and as noted elsewhere, the use of questionnaire to collect data on variables like the family income status of the participants would have been a challenge having regard to the nature of the context of the study. The accuracy of the data being reported would have been in doubt since a good number of parents themselves have a difficulty reporting their incomes accurately. Parents very rarely

disclose their earnings and income levels to their children. The descriptions the participants gave of the income variable, therefore, proved not only to be more informative but also revealed how they view and construct their world. Finally, an unanticipated industrial action by academic staff of the public universities during the fieldwork in the selected institutions also largely, influenced the use of interviews. When the universities were re-opened, the students busily going about their registration and other practical issues were more eager to engage in conversations. The use of interviews, as expected, guaranteed the maximum response rate since the participants could not skip any of the questions during the data collection. According to Patton (2015), “fieldwork often involves on-the-spot decisions” which enables the researcher to benefit from what emerges in the course of the actual data collection (p.299). He adds that “an important element of qualitative fieldwork flexibility is adjusting the...strategy in the field, as what you learn in the field provides new options and insight...” (p.300). The semi-structured interviews also afforded the researcher the opportunity to seek clarifications, ask more probing questions and tailor the interviews to each participant (Bryman, 2012; Dawson, 2002).

The study was basically designed as a dual transformative case study (Savenge & Robinson, 2005; Mertens, 2009); what Stake (1994) refers to as “collective case studies” which comprises groups of individual studies undertaken to gain a fuller picture of the phenomenon (cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2005: 183). Mertens (2009:169) defines case studies as “multifaceted strategies used to explore a bounded system and can involve collection of both quantitative and qualitative data”. The case study design is generally construed as one that allows for an in-depth study of the setting and the phenomena (Borg & Gall, 1989; Robinson, 1995; Savenye & Robinson, 2005; Bryman, 2012, Creswell, 2014). It is considered, among other things, as one that involves the collection of detailed information by typically employing multiple methods such as interviews, and the review of artefacts and documents (Savenge & Robinson, 2005; Creswell, 2014; Stakes, 1995). With specific reference to transformative research, Mertens (2009) argues that the use of case studies is very crucial since they “allow for the type of relationships to develop that are needed for systematic collection of data for the purpose of social transformation” (p.173).

Case studies have often been criticised on a number of fronts. Flyvbjerg (2006) rather calls the perceived weaknesses as *misunderstandings*. He therefore identifies and refutes five of such misunderstandings regarding the use of case studies for research in the social sciences. That: (1) theoretical knowledge which is context-independent is more appreciated than the practical, context-dependent knowledge; (2) the case study cannot contribute to scientific development because the researcher cannot generalise on the basis of a single case; (3) it is most useful in the initial stages of research for the generation of hypotheses whereas other methods are more suitable for testing hypotheses and building theories; (4) it has a propensity to confirm the researcher's preconceived ideas (verification bias); and (5) summarising and developing general propositions from a single case is difficult (p. 221).

On the issue of the value of context-dependent vis-à-vis context-independent knowledge, Flyvbjerg (2006) offers this rebuttal: "Predictive theories and universals cannot be found in the study of human affairs. Concrete, context-dependent knowledge is, therefore, more valuable than the vain search for predictive theories and universals" (p.224). On the arguments regarding generalisation, he posits that "it is incorrect to assume that one cannot generalize from a single case" (p.225), but what is of the essence is the kind of case the individual is dealing with and how it was chosen; and that in the social sciences "the strategic choice of a case may greatly add to its generalisability" (p.226). He further notes that the value of generalisation itself is often over-hyped:

One can often generalize on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalization as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas "the force of example" is underestimated. (p.228)

Others side with Flyvbjerg on the issue of generalisation, noting that the notion that the case study approach cannot provide solid information about the broader class of study is untrue, and the strength of the case study is its ability to capture 'reality' in a detailed fashion, and by so doing, allowing for "both the analysis of a greater number of variables and for generalisation from the concrete, practical, and context-dependent knowledge created in the investigation" (Ruddin, 2006 as cited in Mertens, 2009: 174).

Responding to the issue of subjective bias, Flyvbjerg (2006) points out that the bias is rather towards falsification – correction of the initial ideas the researcher began the study

with - than verification: “The case study contains no greater bias toward verification of the researcher’s preconceived notions than other methods of inquiry. On the contrary, experience indicates that the case study contains a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than toward verification” (p. 237).

In his attempt to refute the claim of the fifth misunderstanding – he indeed admits the difficulty, but also argues that the difficulty does not arise from the case study as a method, but the properties of the reality (case) studied often leads to that. He adds that summarising case studies is often not that necessary: “...Often it is not desirable to summarize and generalize case studies. Good studies should be read as narratives in their entirety” (p.241).

The adoption of a dual case study design therefore was to enable the researcher to particularise, and to the largest extent practicable, generalise from the investigation.

5.3.1 Selection of Cases

As noted elsewhere, the study was targeted at the public universities in Ghana. The two selected institutions —UG and KNUST— are the oldest, largest and foremost HEIs in Ghana, and for that matter, have the most diverse student profiles which was deemed crucial to the study. At the outset of the study, the two institutions enrolled a total of 63,041 students (UG [37,257], KNUST [25,784]) representing 55% of the total number of students (115,453) enrolled in Ghana’s six public universities for the 2010/11 academic year (NCTE, 2011), hence making them more ‘representative’ of the population. With the number of public universities now at 10 following the upgrading of GIMPA and the then IPS (now University of Professional Studies, Accra) into full-fledged universities; the establishment of the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) as well as the University of Energy and Natural Resources⁵¹, the most recent data available indicate that the two selected institutions still command 50.7% of the 127,918 total enrolment for the public universities for the 2013/2014 academic year⁵².

Size and diversity of student profiles apart, the two institutions were also selected due to their voluntary adoption and implementation of affirmative action admission policies. KNUST pioneered the admission of graduates from the rural upper secondary schools –

⁵¹ <http://nab.gov.gh/web3/public-universities> (June 2, 2015)

⁵² <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20150220123309911> (June 2, 2015)

the so-called less-endowed admissions in the 2003/2004 academic year that automatically offers admission to the three best female and three male students from the schools categorised as deprived by the GES, who meet the basic entry requirements for admissions based on their performance in the school-leaving exams, but who otherwise, cannot get in to the various programmes on offer in the University due to the competitive cut-off points for the 'regular' admissions. UG also rolled out a similar intervention for such students although the implementation is entirely different from that of KNUST. Again, UG also admits females into programmes in the humanities a grade-point lower than their male counterparts, supposedly, to shore up the share of females in the University's enrolment. Since the study sought to investigate and understand the distribution of HE opportunities in general, with affirmative action, gender, geographical location being key planks of the study, the selection of the two institutions was the 'logical path' towards the achievement of the said goals.

The UG, located in Ghana's capital, Accra is the country's premier HEI established in 1948 by the then British Colonial Administration as the University College of the Gold Coast and affiliated to the University of London. It attained a full university status on October 1, 1961 by Act 79 of the Parliament of Ghana following the country's attainment of independence in 1957 and a republican status in 1960. The University of Ghana Act, 2010 (Act 806) which replaced the founding Act (79) clearly spells out its aims: "The aims of the University are to provide higher education, undertake research, disseminate knowledge, and foster relationships with outside persons and bodies..." (UG, 2012: 5). It has a vision of becoming "a 'World Class research-intensive University' over the next decade" and a related mission of creating an "enabling environment that makes University of Ghana increasingly relevant to national and global development through cutting-edge research as well as high quality teaching and learning"⁵³. UG boasts of a number of research centres and institutes including the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research (NMIMR) and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER). It co-operates actively with other universities and institutions around the globe for research and teaching, as well as staff and student exchanges. It currently recruits international students from more than 70 countries⁵⁴.

⁵³ http://www.ug.edu.gh/about/mission_vision (June 9, 2015)

⁵⁴ <https://www.ug.edu.gh/about/overview>

The University reorganised its academic units by adopting the collegiate system in the 2014/2015 academic year, a move it claims is geared towards “enhancing efficiency and making university administration effective”. There are currently four colleges: Basic and Applied Science, Humanities, Education and Health Sciences. Of the total of 38, 586 students in enrolment in the 2012/2013 academic year, 82.3% (31,755) were undergraduates (the target population for this study) pursuing various bachelor degree programmes while 4.6% and 13.1% were enrolled in sub-degree and graduate programmes respectively. In terms of gender, there were approximately 41% female and 59% male students in enrolment during the same period (UG, 2014: 5, 14).

KNUST is located in Kumasi, the second largest city in Ghana and approximately 254 km inland from Accra. Like UG, KNUST was initially established on October 6, 1951 as the Kumasi College of Technology and affiliated to the University of London. The Kumasi College of Technology metamorphosed as full-fledged university on August 22, 1961 by an Act of Parliament and was subsequently renamed after Ghana’s first president – Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah. A military coup d’état which led to the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 also resulted in a change in the name of the University to University of Science and Technology. The promulgation of Act 559 of 1998 has since restored the name of the institution to the original KNUST⁵⁵.

It envisions being “globally recognised as the Premier Centre of excellence in Africa for teaching in Science and Technology for development; producing high calibre graduates with knowledge and expertise to support the industrial and socio-economic development of Ghana and Africa”⁵⁶. As far as its mission is concerned, KNUST aims at providing

... an environment for teaching, research and entrepreneurship training in Science and Technology for the industrial and socio-economic development of Ghana, Africa and other nations. KNUST also offers service to community, is opened to all the people of Ghana and positioned to attract scholars, industrialists and entrepreneurs from Africa and other international communities. (ibid)

In 2005, the University adopted the collegiate system citing the growth in student numbers and academic programmes as the main reasons. KNUST currently has six colleges: Agriculture and Natural Resources, Architecture and Planning, Art and Social Sciences, Engineering, Health Sciences and Science offering a total of 90 first degree

⁵⁵ <http://www.knust.edu.gh/about/knust/history>

⁵⁶ <http://www.knust.edu.gh/about/knust/mandate>

programmes⁵⁷. The University's research centres and institutes include the Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research, the Institute of Science and Technology for Africa and the Centre for Cultural and African Studies. In 2013/2014, total enrolment stood at 45,897 including 37,345 (81.4%) first degree students. The female share of enrolment of students pursuing first degree programmes (11,386) was less than a third (30.5%) of that of the male category (KNUST,2014: 8).

5.4 Data Collection and Methods

The study used both primary and secondary data. The researcher collected the data personally, primarily, from the two research sites (UG in Accra and KNUST in Kumasi, Ghana) from August-September, 2014, however some secondary data from the institutions were received after this period since both institutions had just reopened and the university administrators had other pressing and equally important issues to attend to. Apart from UG and KNUST, data (primary and secondary) were also collected from three other relevant government institutions: The MoE, the NCTE as well as the GES which is the policy-implementing agency of the government for education up to the second-cycle level.

As indicated earlier, the data for the study were collected from multiple sources. The primary data were sourced from semi-structured interviews, the researcher's field notes and observations from the research sites during the fieldwork. The secondary data comprised published documents from the two case institutions, the NCTE and the GES as well as raw statistical data on various student variables such as applications, admissions and enrolment, gender and previous secondary schools; archived by the institutions covering at least the last five years for which data were available. The primary source of data, however, were from the interviews and the secondary data were employed to supplement and complement the primary data so as to gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomena, with the view to answering the research questions fully. The approach to the data collection could therefore be described as *triangulation*. Creswell (2014: 185,186) maintains that it is typical for qualitative researchers to employ multiple sources of data than rely on a single source of data. They then review all the data, make sense of them and organise them into themes and categories reflecting the all the data sources. Patton (1999) identified four types of

⁵⁷ <http://www.knust.edu.gh/admissions/prospective/ugprogrammes>

triangulation in qualitative research: *methods triangulation*, *sources triangulation*, *analyst triangulation* and *theory/perspective triangulation*. As far as the data collection for this study was concerned, the researcher's choices fit the first two typologies – methods and sources. While the former is concerned with checking the consistency of the findings from the different methods for collecting the data, the latter examines the consistency of findings within the same method (p.1193). In this study, the quantitative data for example, sometimes validated the claims from the interview participants and further revealed the scale of the issues the participants made allusion to; hence, deepening understanding of the phenomenon in question. Disconfirmation of data from the quantitative and the qualitative did not harm the analyses but rather illuminated and opened interesting angles to the study in line with Patton's (1999) claim that researchers triangulating data sources should not be overly bothered about consistency, since much can be learnt from disconfirming cases as well. The strategy, to a large extent, ensured that the study does not only afford the reader the opportunity to listen to what Lumby (2011:9) calls the "dissonant music of inequality", but also appreciate the statistics and the mathematics of inequity of access to HE in Ghana. It further helped avoid what Clark (1973) refers to as "managerial sociology" obsessed with quantitative measurements and a reduction of the discipline of sociology of HE to "journalistic play". Clark admonishes the adoption of a comparative methods approach to the study of inequality in HE (pp.10-12).

According to Cohen et al (2005: 112), in the social sciences, triangular techniques "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data". They further postulate that triangulation, arguably, helps solve the problem of 'method-boundedness' as well as the issues of validity and reliability; and that its strength is often felt when a complex phenomenon demands explanation. Bryman (2008: 379) also argues that triangulation, which involves employing more than one source of data or method to study social phenomena, can be used either within or across research strategies. For Patton (1999), the notion behind the use of triangulation is that "no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality,

multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill” (p.1192).

5.4.1 Selection of Participants

For a fuller understanding and a better appreciation of the phenomena, it became necessary that while focusing on the issues at the micro level (student and graduates), attention is equally paid to the meso (HEIs) and the macro (system) level policies. The researcher’s belief is that none of these levels operates in isolation, and that there is constant interaction among them. Student behaviour influences policy-making at both the institutional and system levels. Similarly, a change in government’s policy on funding HEIs, for instance, will immediately trigger a response from both students and the HEIs as they compete for space, influence and to further their ‘parochial’ interests.

According to McDonough and Fann (2007), while individual level studies focus on the attributes of people as the key determinants of inequality, institutional-level studies examine how educational institutions shape aspirations, structure opportunities and provide information for the individual. Macro-level analysis then integrates the individual and the institutional by “accounting for the reciprocal influence of students and institutions on each other and by illuminating the dynamic interactions of student behaviour with professionals’ and policymakers’ practices” (p.55).

A total of 26 interviews were conducted comprising 18 students, two graduates (micro level), three HEI officials (meso level) and one each from the MoE, the NCTE and the GES (macro/system level). To achieve depth without sacrificing breadth, the 18 students interviewed from the two case study institutions were selected from 14 disciplines ranging from History to Medicine and from all the levels (Year 1 to Year 4) of the undergraduate programmes. They further represent a fair balance between the sexes (10 females and 8 males) and other SES relevant to the study—family income, parental education, and geographical location. The interview questions were not specific to the respondent’s institution of study but were that which border on the university sub-sector in general.

The participants for the semi-structured interviews were chosen through non-probabilistic and purposive methods with elements of quota and snowball sampling, particularly for the student and graduate participants— the primary interest group. Savenge & Robinson (2005: 68) note the following with regard to sample size and selection in qualitative studies:

Typically, multiple voices of several participants are described and compared. Research participants are typically selected not randomly, but purposively in an effort to carefully represent those many voices. These samples may be small, but are described in great detail, to derive deep insights regarding them and the research context.

At UG, nine students (five females and four males) were interviewed. Four of the students were in the second year of the four-year bachelor degree programme, three in the third year and two in the final year. There was no student-participant from the first year because at the time of the interview, the UG had not completed admissions for the 2014/2015 academic year, and as a result, first year students had not reported to the campus. The nine students also included two students (female and a male) with disabilities. The UG students interviewed were pursuing programmes in Sociology, History, Political Science, Biochemistry, Engineering, Mathematics, Economics and Business Administration.

The number of students interviewed at KNUST was the same as that of UG—five females and four males. Again, the students interviewed were at various stages of their four-year bachelor degree programmes: two from year one, five from year two and two from the final year. The two graduates also came from KNUST. The students and graduates at KNUST were drawn from Agriculture, Economics, Architecture, Medicine, Law, Nursing, Engineering, Political Studies and Publishing Studies.

The researcher selected the students and graduates purposively with the following criteria in mind: (1) those studying at the bachelor degree level; (2) fair balance between the genders; (3) students at different stages of the degree programme; (4) broader representation of the disciplines; and (5) representation from vulnerable and or minority groups. The number of female students was slightly higher than that of the males due to the gender component of the study which sought to gauge the experiences of females and understand their under-representation in HE in Ghana. The broader representation of students from the disciplines was aimed at answering the research questions, exploring not just who gets access to a public university in Ghana, but access to what? (Disciplinary or programme destination of entrants). It further sought to understand the under-representation of females in the scientific and technical fields hence the interview of female students in fields like Engineering, Architecture and Biochemistry.

The interview of the two students with disabilities was facilitated by snowball sampling through the help of the official in charge of the unit responsible for their welfare on campus. Apart from the students with disabilities, one of the graduates was also interviewed through snowball having been recommended by the other. Both students were 'products' of the rural less-endowed upper secondary schools whom the University admits on affirmative action, and therefore, are in the minority and difficult to locate just like those with disabilities. Their experiences were deemed very crucial to the investigation.

The interview of participants from all the three levels (micro, meso and macro) was not just to gain a multi-perspective and a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied but also to gauge the level of interaction and influence among the three levels.

What is deemed an adequate sample size for interviews remains a highly subjective issue in qualitative research. Whereas some scholars give a range of sizes, others put definite figures to them. While Bertaux (1981), for example, considers 15 as the smallest sample size for qualitative research (as cited in Guest et al., 2006: 61), Kuzel (1992) argues that the heterogeneity of the sample as well as the research objectives should be the guiding principles and therefore recommends six to eight interviews for a homogeneous sample and between 12 and 20 interviews "when looking for disconfirming evidence or trying to achieve maximum variation" (as cited in Guest et al., 2006: 61). Creswell (2014) would rather use the research design as the decider. An alternative approach to dealing with the issue has been the use of so-called theoretical point of saturation at which the researcher ends the interview because all the themes or categories have become 'saturated' and no new insights emerge from the subsequent interviews (ibid: 189; Guest et al., 2006). For this study, Kuzel's (1992) disconfirming evidence and maximum variation, as well as theoretical saturation and practical considerations were all at play.

5.4.2 Data Recording Procedures

All the 26 interviews were semi-structured, face-to-face with open-ended questions. In qualitative social research, the semi-structured interviews are perhaps the most common and its use affords the researcher the opportunity to collect specific information which can be compared and contrasted with other interviews (Dawson 2002:28; Bryman, 2012: 472; Cohen et al., 2005). The interview guide had the following themes drawn from the research questions and the literature review: procedural and distributive justice,

meritocracy, affirmative action, parental education, family income, gender, geographical location, disability and general demographic information (students and graduates). The participants were not bothered directly with terminologies like meritocracy, procedural justice although there were discussions around those themes.

With the afore-mentioned criteria in mind, the researcher personally approached the participants at the research sites, sought and received the consent of those who met the criteria before the interview was conducted. Graduate students who had agreed to participate were left out when the researcher upon further interrogation, discovered they did not fit the undergraduate criterion. Moreover, undergraduates from disciplines and year groups from which other students had already been interviewed were equally exempted.

Prior to that, a written permission had been sought and granted from the selected institutions for the data collection. Before the commencement of the interview, each of the participants was briefed on the research and assured of anonymity. In some cases, they were also shown the letter that had been obtained for the data collection, and the researcher's photo identification confirming his designation as spelt out in the said letter. This gave the participants, particularly the female students and students from the minority groups, the confidence to speak when the interview got underway. All the interviews were tape-recorded using a rechargeable USB-like recorder the researcher had purchased and tested for the purpose. All the participants were informed and had consented before the recording. Since most of the interviews were done outside and in the open, the small nature of the device gave some confidence to the participants especially the students, and passers-by hardly noticed an interview was taking place. They were also offered the option to choose a site they were more comfortable with before the conduct of the interviews.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews ensured variations in the order of discussing the themes. The gender variable was particularly targeted at the female participants just as that on disability was reserved for the students with disabilities although they (students with disabilities) dealt with the other themes as the others had done. The use of semi-structured interview was particularly well-suited for the collection of data on the family income variable due to the nature of the research context. It allowed

the participants to describe the financial positions of their families which would have been extremely difficult using a questionnaire as an instrument, and allowing the participants to select from bands of incomes with little or no opportunity to probe and seek further clarifications. It further brought to light how the participants construct 'reality' as some participants who had reported coming from homes struggling to afford basic necessities such as food, nonetheless indicated coming from average income families. As is the case in many developing countries, accurate reporting of incomes presents a real challenge even for government agencies in Ghana.

5.5 Data Management, Analyses and Interpretation

The analyses of the interview data began on the field. After each of the interviews, the recording was automatically saved to the recorder which also functioned as a USB storage. The recordings were copied to the computer and backed up to another external storage device. Each of the recordings for the day was played back to ascertain the quality and content of the interviews. Listening to the recorded interviews helped the researcher, in some instances, revise some of the questions as well as including other interesting angles emerging from the views of the participants.

All the interviews were manually transcribed verbatim using the *F4 Transcription* software the researcher had purchased for the purpose. The software was particularly useful since it allowed a pause, rewind, forwarding and reducing or increasing the speed of the playback. These controls are all available by pressing either the F4 or F5 key on the computer's keyboard and would therefore not require taking the hands off the keyboard to use any of the controls. It also has the option of saving the transcript with the timestamps which was extremely useful since it made going back to replay specific portions of the interviews easier. The transcripts were saved in a rtf format which is more compatible with other software for analysis like the *Atlas.ti* and *Nvivo*. These features of the *F4 Transcription* software made it more preferable to the conventional *Windows Media Player*, for example.

With the exception of words such as 'eh, 'umm' which were excluded, other crutch words were included in the transcription. In a few instances, where the participant's voice was inaudible a question mark was put there in parenthesis or where the researcher heard a certain word but was not completely sure about it, the word was put in parenthesis and a question mark was added [?]. Those instances, were very minor and did not in any way

impact the overall quality of the recordings. Sentences that were started but could not be completed before another was began, were indicated with a stroke symbol (/). The symbol (inc.–low voice) was used in situations where the statement was incomprehensible and or the voice was too low. The symbols used followed the conventions suggested by the F4 Transcription manual. A total of 180 pages of texts were generated from the transcription. The quantitative data were processed using Microsoft Excel; and percentages, frequency tables and charts were generated to support the qualitative data from the transcripts as and when necessary.

Following the completion of the transcription, the transcripts were reviewed after which followed the reduction, sense-making and a thematic analyses of the data. Dawson (2002) believes that “qualitative data analysis is a very personal process” adding that the analysis “can be viewed as forming a continuum from highly qualitative methods to almost quantitative methods, which involve an element of counting” (p. 128). Others hold that the process should be “governed both by fitness for purpose and legitimacy...” (Cohen et al., 2005: 82).

The transcripts from the interviews were manually coded, categorised and labelled using the ‘cut and paste’ function of a word processor. Thus, the views of all the participants on a particular theme, for example, affirmative action, were grouped together and the patterns, variations etc. were identified, aggregated and reported. Patton (2002) argues that despite the fact that software programmes affords various tools and formats for coding, “the principles of the analytical process are the same whether doing it manually or with the assistance of a computer program” (p. 120). In fulfilment of the researcher’s pledge of anonymity to the participants, all the quotations were anonymised as follows:

- SP – Student participant
- GP – Graduate participant
- HOP – HEI official participant
- GOP – Government official participant

The students and graduates had their gender and disciplines added to their comments to reflect the importance of the gender variable in particular, and for a fair representation and diversity of opinions – a multi-perspective reportage. The students’ levels in their various programmes were in most cases omitted to strengthen anonymity.

The researcher experimented *Atlas.ti* for the coding but retreated at some point due to the tendency of the software to fragment the data. Such an approach would have been out of step with the researcher's goal of giving the participants, especially the disadvantaged, a voice which necessitated long verbatim quotations and the story-telling (narrative) mode of reporting the results in some instances, and by so doing, identifying the 'trees' taking shade in the 'forest'.

Apart from the verbatim quotes giving the participants a voice, it also served the purposes of evidence and illustration (see Bryman, 2012). **"What people actually say and the descriptions of events observed remain the essence of qualitative inquiry...**Indeed, the skilled analyst is able to get out of the way of the data to let the data tell their own story" (Patton, 2002:457, emphasis in original). The coding was both concepts and data-driven (Gibbs, 2007) or what Patton (2002: 454, 456) calls 'sensitizing concepts' (categories that oriented the fieldwork usually from the literature review) or 'indigenous concepts' (emerging from the data and often from the participants) – it was a mix of both induction and deduction using both the themes arising out of the literature review and that emerging from the data. Qualitative analysis is deemed to begin from an inductive phase where themes, patterns and categories are identified from the data and progresses to a deductive stage where the authenticity of the patterns, themes, categories identified in the inductive phase, including deviant cases, are established and confirmed for their appropriateness (ibid: 453, 454). The qualitative, quantitative data processed from the data archived by the relevant institutions, as well as the official documents were all integrated in the reporting of the results. The results were interpreted using the literature reviewed, the conceptual frameworks as well as the researcher's common sense knowledge and experience from the context. As far as practicable, multiple perspectives (students, graduates, HEI and government officials) were reported and negative cases were equally stated on each of the themes for a deeper understanding and a better appreciation of the phenomenon under consideration. This was necessary to avoid researcher bias and 'cherry-picking' only confirming evidence.

In the presentation of results from the qualitative data, the frequency of participant views was sometimes counted – a practice referred to as 'quasi-quantification' (Bryman, 2012; Kuckartz, 2014)— and some information presented in a tabular form. Bryman (2012) argues that qualitative researchers sometimes quantify a limited amount of their data.

Such quasi-quantification counters the oft-cited critique of qualitative presentation of data being too anecdotal, noting that “such simple counting conveys a clear sense of their relative prevalence” and further allows the researcher to inject “greater precision into estimates of frequency”, as opposed to the use of terms such as ‘many’, ‘frequently’, ‘some’ (p. 624-625).

5.6 Trustworthiness and Authenticity

The application of validity and reliability as metrics for the evaluation of the quality of qualitative research as is the case in quantitative research remains hotly contested since the two metrics have different connotations in qualitative research (Bryman, 2008; Le Compte & Goetz, 1992 cited in Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). *Trustworthiness* and *authenticity* have therefore been proposed as alternatives to the much debated validity and reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Bryman, 2012: 390; Creswell, 2014). Trustworthiness entails *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *conformability*. Authenticity which primarily concerns itself with the broader issues of the political impact of the research is deemed controversial, and its influence, muted (Bryman, 2012: 390-393). Creswell’s (2014) counsel is that the researcher employs multiple approaches which will facilitate their ability to determine the accuracy of the findings while also assuring readers of the accuracy of the work. To this end, he proposes *validity strategies* with eight elements which according to him, have often been employed ranging from the easy to implement and frequently used, to the most difficult to implement and rarely used: (1) triangulation from different data sources; (2) member checking; (3) rich, thick descriptions; (4) clarification of researcher bias; (5) reporting negative or discrepant information; (6) prolonged fieldwork; (7) peer debriefing; and (8) the use of an external auditor (pp. 201-203).

In regard to this study, a number of steps, as far as practicable, were taken to assure ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’. The triangulation of data sources, and the presentation of same in the analyses, has undoubtedly deepened understanding and facilitated a better appreciation of the phenomena studied. Such “multiple accounts of social reality” (Bryman, 2012: 390) brought credibility to the work and should therefore make it trustworthy. The use of thick descriptions, long verbatim quotations exposed the socio-economic and cultural milieus of the research context, and should guide future researchers’ decisions regarding the replicability and transferability of the study in other

contexts. Again, the researcher recognises that “complete objectivity is impossible in social research” (ibid: 392), hence the clarification of the researcher’s role in the introductory part of the study. However, the use of long verbatim quotations was to serve as evidence for the reader to make their own judgements; that, coupled with the reporting of negative and discrepant cases should undoubtedly assure readers of ‘objectivity’. It is a recognition and an acknowledgement of the fact that “research cannot be value free”, but as far as attainable, ensuring that there was “no untrammelled incursion of values in the research process...” (Bryman, 2012: 39).

The participants for the study were not promised a ‘member checking’ of the views they expressed during the interviews. That notwithstanding, the frequent playbacks of the interviews during the period of the fieldwork and transcription, and further, at the report writing stage; the inclusion of crutch words, laughter etc. in the verbatim quotations should undeniably guarantee accuracy. Even so, the value of the practice of member checking, otherwise known as *respondent validation*, is contested: “It is highly questionable whether research participants can validate a researcher’s analysis, since this entails inferences being made for an audience of social science peers” (ibid: 391). Clarifications were also sought through emails on aspects of the secondary data that were unclear to the researcher from the respective institutions.

CHAPTER SIX: UNDERSTANDING THE FAIRNESS OF THE DISTRIBUTION AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

...there are some SHS in Ghana when you attend them, let's say, 90 percent of the students will move into the tertiary institutions and there are some schools too, it will be difficult for you to pass out (Student-Participant).

This chapter presents the findings from the data gathered to answer the research questions and further attempts analyses of same, using the literature reviewed in Chapter Three and Chapter Four as well as the conceptual frameworks. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first part deals with arguments and evidence of the fairness of the distribution and the procedure, while the latter focuses on social stratification.

SECTION ONE: FAIRNESS OF THE DISTRIBUTION AND THE PROCEDURE

This section covers four themes – meritocracy, procedural justice, affirmative action and distribute justice – and presents the views of the participants on the admission procedures, and how they impact the distribution of admission slots to students seeking admission to the public universities in Ghana.

6.1 Meritocracy

Under this category, the participants were asked to give their views on the requirements for admission into undergraduate programmes in the public universities in Ghana. They were further asked to give their opinions on whether or not the universities should maintain the status quo of admitting applicants according their grades or performance in the upper secondary schooling-leaving examinations (WASSCE) or they should consider other factors linked to the applicant's personal circumstances. The final question also sought the opinions of the participants as to whether or not they thought that their previous educational background, particularly, the upper secondary school they attended, influenced (positively or negatively) their chances of gaining admission to the university.

6.1.1 Admission Requirements

The minimum entry requirements for upper secondary school graduates seeking admission into HEIs (universities and polytechnics) have been stipulated by the NCTE and the NAB. Applicants are required to obtain six credit passes (A1-C6) for WASSCE and

(A-D) for the SSSCE (see Table 3 for the interpretation of grades)⁵⁸, compromising three core subjects including English Language, Mathematics in addition to three relevant elective subjects from the WASSCE (NCTE & NAB websites, 2015)⁵⁹. Thus, in principle, the minimum aggregate for an applicant seeking admission is Aggregate 36 (six C6) but the high competition and demand for admission means that in practice, it is extremely difficult for an applicant with Aggregate 36 to enrol in a study programme in the university. Institutions admit students with the best and highest grades based on the number of admission seats available in each admission stream, and a 'cut-off' point determined by the performance of students in the WASSCE for each admission year. The participants therefore were made to express their views on the admission requirements.

Table 3: Interpretation of Upper Secondary Grades (ISCED Level 3)

WASSCE	INTERPRETATION	SSSCE	INTERPRETATION
A1	1 (Excellent)	A	1 (Excellent)
B2	2 (Very Good)	B	2 (Very Good)
B3	3 (Good)	C	3 (Good)
C4	4 (Credit)	D	4 (Credit)
C5	5 (Credit)	E	5 (Pass)
C6	6 (Credit)	F	(Fail)
D7	7 (Pass)		
E8	8 (Pass)		
F9	9 (Fail)		

Source: Based on Anyan, 2015:9.

The findings indicate that the views of the participants were sharply divided. For the purpose of the analysis, I grouped the views into three: *Approval* (those who were generally comfortable with the requirements), *Ambivalence* (those whose views straddled approval and disapproval) and *Disapproval* (those who were not pleased with the requirements). Of the 17 students and graduates who responded to the question, six showed their approval, six disapproval and five were ambivalent about the issue:

I think it's very simple... every SHS student writes the WASSCE exam so you just need to pass the exam, get good results, you apply. If your results are good for the course you get the course, so you don't really have to do much, you just have to study hard, that's all (SP5, female, Biochemistry).

SP5 born and bred in an urban area, attended the secondary school that has produced five of Ghana's presidents. She was admitted to the school after completing a private JHS with six Grade 1's from the seven subjects she sat for during the BECE. SP5 also enrolled

⁵⁸ The SSSCE was replaced in 2007 with the WASSCE but applicants to the HEIs with that qualification were still considered for admission.

⁵⁹ <http://ncte.edu.gh/images/pdf/Minimum%20requirements.pdf>

in the Biochemistry programme with Aggregate Seven from the WASSCE. Her previous educational attainments clearly set her apart; it's one of the best any student can attain.

Though from a different university, SP12 like SP5, obtained Seven Grade 1's from the BECE having attended a private JHS in the same city as SP5 and was admitted to the four-year BSc Architecture programme with Aggregate Eight from the WASSCE. These were her views indicating approval of the current admission requirements:

OK, I have not really thought much about it, but so far I think it's OK, the requirements are OK but from the past years it's been down but now they are raising them up so I think it's OK... (SP12, female, Architecture).

SP6 also believes that the demands of the programmes offered in the university come nowhere near what is expected of the students in upper secondary schools, and for that matter, the current admission requirements can be justified on that grounds. He has lived all his life in Accra - the capital, and like SP5 and SP12, he gained entrance to the SHS with Aggregate Seven from the BECE. He argues:

I think they are OK. They are OK because when you come to the university, how do I say it?, the pile of things you come to learn in a semester is nowhere compared to what you will be doing in SHS for two years; so it's just about how we think when we are in SHS. We think it's too big for us, but when you come to realise that is the normal experience, I think you pass...it's normal. (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

It should be emphasised that not all the participants who gave their approval for the current admission requirements came from well-endowed secondary schools and privileged backgrounds. GP1 who recently graduated from BA Publishing Studies, having had both the basic and upper secondary in schools in a rural and deprived district of the country also sanctioned it. GP1 had obtained Aggregate 12 from the WASSCE – a very good grade point judging from the quality of school attended – had planned to pursue a degree in Law but could not gain admission to the programme. The justification she offered in support of the requirements is that it tends to boost the morale of the student to be diligent in their studies as they aspire to enrol in the university:

Oh I think it's; (pause) personally, I don't have any problem with that. I think it's OK because it helps the applicant to learn hard in order to get access to university. I think it's a good thing that they have cut-off points and all that so that as you are there you know how to go about your studies and all that. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

SP15 is among those who registered their disapproval of the requirements, admitting that the situation has been occasioned by the increasing number of applicants, and as a consequence, would not blame anyone for that:

Actually, I heard it's been said that if you get D4 [7] you don't get, but then because of the number of people that want to get in even when you have very good grades sometimes you don't get the courses that you deserve, and then it's quite bad but it can't be blamed; no one actually can be blamed since there is pressure on the universities. (SP15, female, Nursing)

In fact, SP15's view does resonate with a senior HEI official. When I asked him if there should be a rethink of the HE admission policy which solely relies on the applicant's grades from the WASSCE; this is what he had to say:

Yeah, like I told you, for the moment because of the numbers, it is, it is difficult to combine the two. Sometime ago, for example, there was matured student entrance. At that time, they were only taking 30 people. They will start with about 120 applications and screen it down to about 30. But these days you advertise, and you know thousands of applications come in and you can't even have the time to spend with each person. Those days you take the exam, and you write a long essay and you attend that interview; so they process, the interview is to check to be sure that you wrote the long essay yourself and you understand what you wrote and so on, but these days because of the numbers it's not possible to do that; and I guess with any other thing, it also takes a lot of effort and, that is not to say that because it takes effort it shouldn't be done. But other people also argue that ... others have done so well, so why do you bypass them and go to other people who have not done so well for whatever reason? because presumably, they all face the same conditions apart from the urban-rural divide that we talked about, but I mean, certainly, some proportions of the intake should go to some of these considerations. (HOP2)

Obviously, HOP2 defends admitting students by relying on just the grades from the school-leaving exams on the grounds of expediency. Procedurally, it does make the work of admission officers easier even if it will mean that opportunities for HE are not fairly distributed to all segments of the society. The notion that 'others have done so well' (on exams) does portray Berg's (2010) phenomenon of *testocracy*, and his argument that the notion of meritocracy, narrowly interpreted as test scores and grade point averages without regard for other context variables, will not work for the poor, discussed in Chapter Three. As Palmer et al. (2011) maintain, the practice rewards those who have already done well than those who are likely to do well.

HOP2 is however, not a loner as far as his view on the requirements is concerned. SP7 who entered business school with Aggregate Six from the WASSCE (the cut-off point for her year of admission to the university) finds some wisdom in HOP2's argument. She reasons;

...I think it's also good because there are a lot of people applying at the same time, and the only way you can shortlist the one in there, are to use the grades. So I think the grades is very good, although the cut-off point is so high that a lot of people are cut off (SP7, female, Business Administration).

While a public official admits the intense pressure, and the resultant high cut-off points have come about as a result of lack of space in the HEIs, he nonetheless firmly believes

that the phenomenon is also indicative of the country's educational system being of a high standard, which has earned it acknowledgements and awards;

...you see what is actually happening in this country is that now we have a lot of students qualifying for admission into tertiary institutions but because of lack of space they are unable to enter. Now a lot of people; look, let me give you an example. UGMS last year they had 600 students clocking 8A's! All of them 600, 600 all wanting to gain admission to the [University of] Ghana Medical School but because of lack of space, for the first time in the history of the Ghana Medical School, they conducted examinations for them - entrance exam! And they were able to take only 200 out of the 600 who were overqualified, are you getting the point? So Ghana now, the educational system is so high; now people, the children are performing very well. Look, we recently had an excellence award that is for all the students in the five West African countries who are members of WAEC, Ghana topped! 1st, 2nd the whole of West Africa! Are you getting it? The 1st, 2nd and 3rd awards were all won by Ghana, are you getting the point? So as for the educational system is quite high, the spaces are not there but the children are performing very well... (GOP1)

Plausible as GOP1's opinion may seem, SP2, a visually impaired student simply asserts that some of the requirements are just unnecessary. In reference to admissions to the Medical School GOP1 alludes to, he points to some of the ills inherent in over-reliance on one-shot external examinations for admissions which some scholars have argued stifle motivation and intellectual curiosity (see Sigal & Tienda, 2007; Blau et al., 2004; Camara & Schmidt, 1999).

Some requirements are not necessary; they are not needed by a student. For example, if someone wants to offer maybe Medicine and the person has passed all courses, the person has had A's in his seven science courses and the person does not get A in English the person is dropped because he didn't get A in English but the person is supposed to be a medical student and he has been able to pass Physics, Elective Maths, Chemistry, Biology and the other three courses he has had A in all of them - that's Maths, Science and Social [Studies] but because the person just had B2 in English Language, you say he cannot offer Medicine so he's given a different course. Maybe the person too has passion for Medicine, the person can do it and do it well but maybe during the examination period something happened, or he fell sick or something, so that prevented him from getting A1 so due to that his dream course is not offered him and he is offered a different thing that he might not even have interest for. So some requirements are not all that necessary... (SP2, male, Political Science)

Other students, in fact, agree with SP2 regarding certain factors that may influence how a student performs on external examinations which determine whether or not they get admitted to a university;

...those in charge should begin looking at other things so that those people who sometimes are very good but may not be able to perform well due to some financial problems, due to what is going on his mind. He might lose focus during examination time and some even take time or some are not even able to meet their school fees or some are even able to meet it just mostly to examination time. So there are a whole lot of things that go on during examination time, which of course deprives the student of getting a

good mark which has become the only way of selecting people into the tertiary institutions. So I believe that if other places are being looked unto, it will help the students and those who couldn't do well in exam but are good maybe if there are other ways the leaders can look to, it will help well. (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

... if you consider the conditions under which people write examinations, especially the WASSCE exams, sometimes it's fair to give people who probably might have been sick during the exam and all those things a fair trial. Because the fact that the person wrote the exam and got a B+ does not mean that she is not a good student or something, maybe the circumstances surrounding it too, yeah. (SP3, female, History)

SP4 who describes himself as an urban person, graduated from a very respected and so-called well-endowed SHS and got admitted to his dream programme – Engineering. That notwithstanding, he disparages the admission requirements for entrance into the public universities. He opines:

Oh well, it's grade-based, as in, it depends on your performance from the senior high school [SHS] but I think it's supposed to be more than that (SP4, male, Engineering).

When I asked what exactly he meant by 'it's supposed to be more than that', SP4 clarified his position:

It shouldn't be just a pass from the SHS. There should be something to further test, or it shouldn't just be the issue of just picking those who performed better at the WASSCE or something; but there should be an opportunity for those who maybe, did well in one subject or the other to be able to pursue that line of study to help them develop themselves.

The final group of participants expressing their opinions about the admission requirements exhibited an ambivalent stance:

...[Aggregate]36 is OK because sitting in the class for three or four years, (I was a Form Three student), 36 sitting in a class for three years, eight subjects you should get something lesser than that. I think it's OK, but recently by getting a D7 in a core subject where you can't get admission, that's where there is a little problem because in my year like this, 2013, information I had was that a lot of people failed Core Maths and most of my friends who called (I had C4), most of my friends failed Core Maths and most of them didn't gain admission into the public universities so most of them are in the private universities..., so with that one I think there is a problem over there. I also have a friend a lady who had six A's and unfortunately, has some D somewhere in the core subjects and up till now she is still in the house. So with that one I think something has to be done about it, but with the average of let's say, the cut-off 36, it's OK. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

SP16 attended the same SHS as SP4 although they completed in different years and are currently enrolled in different universities. His argument is that the minimum requirement should not be a problem for any individual who has gone through either the four or three-year upper secondary education. He however loses sight of the fact that the

Aggregate 36 is the minimum, and that, it is extremely difficult if not impossible for any applicant to gain admission with that grade point. SP16's comments regarding the admission of applicants with Grade D7 which SP15 had also touched on is noteworthy, although the veracity or otherwise of the situation of the friends he alluded to cannot be independently established. Until the 2010 academic year, applicants to any HEI with Grade D7 and E8 were in principle considered for admission, but a directive from the NCTE and NAB has outlawed that. It was also the norm for some private universities to admit applicants with such grades, with a proviso, that they re-sit the exam and better the grade(s). Institutions found to have flouted the NCTE and NAB directive have been compelled to expel those students irrespective of the level of progression in their study programmes. NAB has recently reiterated its position on the issue of conditional admissions calling the practice "a clear infraction of the national admission requirements", and cautioned the general public to be wary of such admission offers.⁶⁰

A case in point is that of the Methodist University College (MUC) which was proscribed by the NAB in 2012 from admitting students until it had expelled students who were admitted with Grades D7 and E8. MUC consequently expelled such students to the effect that even those who had completed their studies were affected and their certificates withheld⁶¹. A Human Rights Court in Accra has however ruled following a petition filed by the aggrieved students against NAB and MUC, that their withdrawal was unconstitutional and has accordingly, directed that 651 students be reinstated⁶².

Frankly, this is a policy that is blind even to the circumstances of the 'blind' as my interview with a HEI official (HOP1) revealed. In an answer to a question about how students with disabilities are treated with regard to admission, HOP1 stated: "The minimum is C6 so if one gets D7 he is out irrespective of one's condition". I then pressed further to know whether a visually-impaired person with a D7 in any of the five subjects was also not considered. HOP1 again emphasised "No, he is out because Accreditation Board won't allow that, so the minimum is C6, one should get C6".

These participants also revealed their ambivalence about the admission requirements:

Generally, I think it's OK but looking at / I know some courses have a certain kind of prestige attached to it so because of that they increase the requirement level for entry which I think sometimes it's too much but looking at it generally, it's OK". (SP17, female, Law).

OK, generally I think it is cool. But then the only problem is that access to public university is really minimal, and it's like there are so many people who want to come to the university, especially public university, and the cut-off point depending on what course or programme you want to read, to me, it's fair especially for the humanities but for the sciences sometimes it's like, something like Medicine if you don't have eight A's, seven A's then you can't make it at all... (SP3, female, History)

⁶⁰ <http://nab.gov.gh/web3/news1/351-conditional-admissions> (January 28, 2015)

⁶¹ <http://edition.myjoyonline.com/pages/education/201207/89881.php> (January 29, 2015).

⁶² <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/January-29th/methodist-university-college-ordered-to-reinstate-700-students.php>

I think it's OK. It's not too high it's not too low, with the exception of the fact that if you have D7 now you can't have admission, even if you make all A's and a D7, and I think sometimes for some courses they would have to consider. But I don't blame them because they don't have facilities; like the Medical School, so they have to kind of sieve the people but if they could actually increase the number it will be very good.... (SP11, female, Engineering.)

It is interesting that SP17, SP3 and SP11 all point to admissions into the medical schools being overly competitive, although SP17 does not make direct reference to Medicine. SP11's mention of the sieving function being performed by the university supports Young's (2001) position that with certificates and degrees at their disposal, society is harnessing schools and universities to sieve people using their narrow band of values. Shavit et al., (2007a) also see HE as the gatekeeper to the professions and other positions of authority in society. Other participants like SP2, GOP1, and GOP3 also touched on admission to the medical schools.

During my fieldwork I caught up with SP13, a medical student who completed one of the most prestigious girls' SHS in Ghana, having been admitted with six Grade 1's from the BECE. SP13 passed the WASSCE with six A's and two B's, however in the course of the interview she revealed that she had to enrol in the programme as a fee-paying student because she 'didn't do well' in the exams. Bewildered, I asked "you had six A's and two B's and you said you didn't do well, what were you expected to have done?" to which she responded:

OK, when I came to write the exam [entrance], the time given was small and I didn't use my time well so I didn't answer enough questions, we were supposed to answer at least half so I failed that exam. (SP13, female, Medicine)

SP13's case clearly illustrates the misgivings the others have expressed regarding medical school admissions. It further demonstrates how the well-to-do in society can and do effectively maintain inequality in society as Lucas (2001) has argued since she was still able to gain admission because her parents could afford the full fee-paying option (details on fee-paying later).

6.1.2 Grade-based versus Context-relevant Admissions

As stated earlier, the participants were asked to give their opinions as to whether the public universities should continue the practice of admitting students by using the grades from the WASSCE as the sole criterion, or admissions should take into consideration, other contextual variables such as the school attended, geographical location and other SES variables in addition to the applicant's results from the WASSCE. The participants differed in their perspectives on this issue in two key respects. While some argued that admissions should be strictly based on grades and merit, others were of the opinion that the applicant's circumstances should be considered in addition to the grades.

SP12 who gave her approval for the admission requirements for entry into the public universities also argued for the application of strict merit in university admissions:

For me, it should strictly be the WASSCE because the WASSCE is a general thing. When you consider other factors that will be favouritism, favouring other people over others but the WASSCE is a general thing, it doesn't favour anyone; it's OK, yeah (SP12, female, Architecture).

The thrust of her argument is that results from the school-leaving exams present the institution with an 'objective criterion', a 'standard metric' for assessing the admissibility or otherwise of the applicant. SP17 also draws attention to the issue of favouritism, albeit in reference to reverse discrimination:

Looking at / if we are talking about social background, in some cases it's necessary in some cases it's not necessary because there may be a genuinely poor person who was sponsored to attend a prestigious secondary school and if you are going to look at secondary schools, definitely they are going to give more privilege to the less important. So if you look at it in that way it's not really going to be favourable for everyone. (SP17, female, Law)

Others who supported admissions strictly based on grades contend that it is that which shows you are 'capable' and 'what you are made of', and further guarantee that you will be admitted irrespective of your social background. In other words, the grade is a leveller:

... [T]hinking about a course like Human Biology [Medicine] where you are going to handle people's life and all that, it's only fair that they use your results... For a course like Human Biology if / the circumstances do matter but if your foundation is really weak even if you are good and you didn't get a good foundation and you enter a course like Human Biology, you may eventually just fall out. So I don't know if they should consider your social background and circumstances, I think you need the results. (SP13, female, Medicine)

That's the only way they [university] will be able to know whether you are capable or not (SP14, female, Chemical Engineering).

I believe the WASSCE results determines what the person is in a way made of. I think they gave everybody three years or four years to study in SHS, so in a way it's fair that they use that, that's how I think. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate).

We come and then we meet a whole lot of people from different places, I don't think if we should regard all those other things it will really be necessary because there is guarantee(?) that those who pass and get the good grades; I think that should be enough. (SP15, female, Nursing).

I sought the views of GOP3 from the NCTE on this matter, who was of the opinion that merit should be the principal factor in admissions;

... first by merit and then a quota for those / we cannot completely leave those less-endowed institutions...Not strictly by meritocracy, but to some, the highest extent possible, it should be by merit (GOP3).

His frequent use of 'merit' prompted me to ask for his definition of the term, to which he responded; "which is defined as passes obtained at the SSCE [WASSCE], obtained through the examinations" (ibid).

These findings suggest that in the opinion of the participants, the school-leaving exams show not only the applicant's competence and ability, but it is also seen as a predictor of how well they can, and will perform when admitted to a programme of study in the university. SP13, SP14 and GP1's comments in particular contrast sharply with the position of Sigal & Tienda (2007) for example, who argue that standardised tests and examinations are often biased against certain segments of the society such as students from low socio-economic background, and that they have "low predictive validity for future academic success" (p. 490). GOP3's definition of merit further contradicts Brink's (2009) argument in the literature review, to the effect that defining merit based on school-leaving examinations is narrow and flawed since the results are influenced by other contextual variables. Brink's (2009) thesis, in my opinion, holds true in the Ghanaian context where disparities between upper secondary schools in terms of resources are quite marked, resulting in the categorisation of schools as less-endowed and well-endowed, a fact GOP3 makes allusion to.

Participants arguing for context-relevant admissions, as stated earlier, were of the belief that the universities should look beyond just the grades applicants make from the school-leaving exams and consider other factors. Some of the views are captured below. SP9, SP8 and SP4 in unison, call for other factors and validate why it is necessary to consider those factors. SP9 and SP8 in particular, suggest what might be considered beyond the grades. SP9 further recommends that admission boards look at the applicant's innate abilities and things they naturally have a flair for. He seems to agree with other scholars on this point (see Souto-Otero, 2010; Sigal & Tienda, 2007; Blau et. al, 2004; Camara & Schmidt, 1999).

Considering fairness, it might be very important they look at other students who have creative abilities and not only academic-wise, because some students are good but as a result of their circumstances cannot really prove their academic ability at the SHS level, and so they cannot get results that can get them through the Admission Boards to the university. So looking at other factors, maybe creative abilities, abilities to think logically, and especially in the Arts where we have designers, people are naturally born designers and they can do better in those fields. (SP9, male, Agricultural Science)

OK, they should consider other factors because like the continuous assessment; sometimes it's not always that the WASSCE reflects the true results of the student because the examiners are human beings; anything can happen, but with the school academic records it's something that, like, the test is done continuously so it really reflects what the child or what the student is capable of doing, so they should consider other options rather than focusing only on the WASSCE. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

SP8 also points attention to continuous or formative assessment as something that can complement the applicant's results from the matriculation exams, contending that that is

what really gives a true reflection of the capabilities of the students. The continuous assessment, is in principle, part of the assessment process at both the JHS and SHS levels where internal tests, class assignments are given a weighting of 30% and the end of term exams assigned 70%. When students are registered for the external BECE and WASSCE exams, their respective schools are required to send the cumulative assessments covering the in-school years to WAEC to be used for the grading of the candidates' BECE or WASSCE results. The general perception, however, is that WAEC does not add that to the final results and that students are only graded based on their performance in the external exams. Scholars who have argued in support of the use of continuous assessment in HE admissions as discussed in the literature review, believe that apart from the fact that it ensures an equitable distribution of admission seats across students from different social backgrounds, it further measures cognitive abilities and it is also the best behavioural predictor of academic performance (see Tienda & Niu, 2006; Blau et al., 2004; Sigal & Tienda, 2007; Black & William, 1998).

In the Ghanaian context, certain alleged corrupt practices such as teachers 'cooking' marks for students, particularly the overall scores sent to WAEC, have been identified as the bane of the use of formative assessment or class-ranking. This then results in a return to the *status quo ante*, since the scores from such assessments do not reflect the true in-school performance of the student. An efficient audit system should however help address some of the deficiencies associated with the use of formative assessments:

Yeah, they are supposed to consider; they are not supposed to base on only the results, they are supposed to consider other factors because some people schooled in deprived communities and somehow faced one challenge or the other that couldn't help boost their grade or something, so it shouldn't be only grade-based. (SP4, male, Engineering)

...they can't completely rely on the WASSCE results. People write things they don't even know they are writing and they still make the A's cos maybe they bought the [questions?] or something...if I get let's say four A's I don't copy or cheat and I study and I get four A's and someone one got 7A's with answers and you still give [admit] the person, obviously you are picking someone who is not qualified...They shouldn't just use that, cos for USA you write essays, they read the essays, the essays tell a lot about you, they don't just take your SAT results they consider a lot of other things for diversity sake, so if they could also do that here it will be very helpful, cos getting answers is like the easiest thing you could do now. It's very easy; sometimes you don't even have to worry about the exam, you just have to get your money ready and you can get the grades, you can get 8A's and you come to school and I will be in the house. Meanwhile, I studied, I'm qualified, you are not qualified but your grades say you are qualified but I'm not, so they shouldn't just use the grades, if they could find something else to back it up it will be very helpful. (SP11, female, Engineering)

...we have some people who were not even good but in one way or the other they may gain certain access to certain/, have their own way and then pass the exam. So it's like our education is such a way that they are training us for exams, we are not being trained for, how do you call it? Future purpose. Somebody may even do Biology but then he doesn't even think about what goes on around him or her just because all that is required of him is just performance in the exams. (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

SP11 & 18 allege some corrupt practices associated with the external exams where certain candidates may pay to get the questions ahead of time. While they do not substantiate their claim, such issues cannot be dismissed outright, especially in the given context. The integrity of both the BECE and WASSCE have been compromised in the past, and there have been instances where the examining body – WAEC, has announced the cancellation of papers that have been written by candidates or about to be written because they felt the questions had been leaked ahead of the exams. These issues make total reliance on results from external exams for HE admission not only problematic but unfair for students who would want to play by the rules of the game.

6.1.3 Influence of Previous Educational Background – SHS

Public upper secondary schools in Ghana (SHS) have for a long time been stratified along prestige and resource lines, a phenomenon which has inadvertently led to the categorisation of schools as either less-endowed or well-endowed by virtue of their location, infrastructure, teachers among others. The well-endowed schools are located in the urban centres with the greater majority being faith-based but managed by government. Admissions into the SHS, like the HEIs, are done primarily with the grades of applicants from the BECE, and the higher your grades from the BECE, the better your chances of securing a spot in a prestigious school of one's choice. Placement of students into the SHS has since 2005, been computerised under the Computerised School Selection and Placement Service (CSSPS); ostensibly, to eliminate instances where some parents allegedly bribe heads of the elite SHS to admit their wards over more qualified applicants.

Indications from the WASSCE results, over the years, have seen the urban well-endowed schools outclass the rural less-endowed schools. Most students therefore clamour to enrol in the well-endowed SHS to better their chances of gaining admission to the university and study programmes of their choice.

To this end, participants for the study (students and the graduates) were asked to comment as to whether or not they thought that the SHS they attended influenced (positively or negatively) the grades they made in the WASSCE. The analysis revealed that of the 17 participants who responded to the question, 11 were of the opinion that the SHS they attended positively influenced their WASSCE grades, three admitted there was an influence but a negative one. Only one participant reported that the school attended did not influence the WASSCE grades, while the remaining two acknowledged that the school had an influence, but more depended on the individual and not the school.

A closer look at the patterns further revealed that those who enrolled in the so-called well-endowed schools, were the ones reporting a positive influence. Nine of the 11 students reporting a positive influence attended Option 3 (category A) SHS, one Option 2 and another a private SHS. Some of the views expressed are reported below:

With this one, we have SHS in Ghana, but in Ghana we have high schools within SHS. We have some high schools / actually, sometime ago I was walking with my Dad and we met

a man and I was about to write my WASSCE and the man asked which form am I and my Dad said "I'm about to write WASSCE" and the man asked "which school?", and I said "Accra Academy" and the man said "with Accra Academy if your son doesn't make it to the university, meaning he is not willing to go to school". So there are some SHS in Ghana when you attend them, let's say 90 percent of the students will move into the tertiary institutions and there are some schools too it will be difficult for you to pass out. (SP16, male. Political Studies)

OK taking from the lower level, the schools I attended were schools that people would have loved to attend and also the high school I attended [Accra Academy] was classified as an 'A' high school so once you were there, you know, you were forced to do what you have to do to make the grades. So I can say it influenced me to make it to the university. (SP4, male, Engineering)

SP16 and SP4 currently enrolled in two different universities attended upper secondary schools they regard as 'high school within high schools' and Class A high school respectively. Their responses clearly show they thought they had a head start, and further reveal the absence of a parity of esteem among the schools.

For a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, I interviewed the official in charge of the SHS at the national level and asked why certain schools (SHS) were classified as 'A', others as 'B' etc., and what actually went into the categorisations. The official then clarified that the A, B, C, categorisations have been replaced by what they call Option 3, 2 and 1 schools respectively, and that they came about as a result of the computerisation of the placement of JHS graduates into the SHS. He further explained;

...we realised that some schools which were seemingly very, very popular to parents, students chose such schools for their first, second and third choices yet they didn't get it because when they miss out on the first school, they equally miss out on the second and the third. And we sat down to find out why that took place and we realised that the schools were of the same popularity and most of the times they had the same kind of measure of infrastructure and teachers. So we then said, OK, let's group all those things across the country, that is region by region and call them Option 1 [3] or Category A and those other schools that were followed next we called that Category B or Option 2 now, and then we had the third...(GOP2)

After the briefing on the history and the change of nomenclature, he then went on to detail how the categorisations were done:

Now, so we were doing so just by virtue of popularity and not necessarily academic performance; even though some of them, particularly those in the A or the Option 3, majority of them are those that are well-performing but there are also schools which are in Option 2 that are well-performing, but they lack what we think/ they are not very popular, and they are not very popular because; (1) sometimes they don't have the facilities. The school may be small, they may have just about a total population of about 200. That doesn't make it popular because the population is already too small. If for a whole school you can find out that the final year students will just be about 50, 60 candidates and most students will not want to go there to miss their chance by picking those schools. (ibid.)

Table 4: Distribution of Public SHS in Ghana by Region and Status, 2014

Region	% share of Ghana's Population	Categories			Total
		Option 3	Option 2	Option 1	
Ashanti	19.4	15	20	67	102
Brong Ahafo	9.4	9	8	47	64
Central	8.9	12	9	33	54
Eastern	10.7	10	20	51	81
Greater Accra	16.3	10	9	22	41
Northern	10.1	4	5	31	40
Upper East	4.2	5	3	17	25
Upper West	2.8	4	3	16	23
Volta	8.6	6	13	60	79
Western	9.6	7	10	30	47
Total	100	82	100	374	556

Note: Option 3 represents the most popular and prestigious schools formerly categorised by the GES as Category A schools. The categories are therefore in a descending order from the highest to the lowest.

Sources: GES, 2014; GSS, 2013.

As Table 4 indicates, as of 2014, there were 556 public SHS (grammar type) across the country. Of this number, 15% was categorised as Option 3 (formerly category A) - what GOP2 refers to as 'well-performing and have already made the name for themselves'. Option 2 schools (category B) - 'the not very popular, lacking infrastructure' constituted 18%, while the Option 1 (category C) - those schools which in the words of GOP2 'most students will not want to go there to miss their chance' dominated with 67%. Evidently, the resource-poor SHS dominate the upper secondary educational landscape. However, some regions appear to have a disproportionate share of such schools - Northern (78%), Volta (76%) and Brong Ahafo (73%), for instance.

His repeated use of the term 'popularity' made me question whose definition of popularity was used for those categorisations - that of the public (parents, students) or that of his outfit, to which he responded;

Yeah, when we say the popularity it was from the choice by the candidates, and you know the candidates themselves see the schools as they see them, and most of it the influence is from the parents. Prempeh College; somebody has attended Prempeh College and says, "I'm a product of Prempeh College so I want my children to go to Prempeh College". Somebody from Accra Academy says "I want my children to go to that one"; that kind of thing.... So it was the choice by the candidates while they were in the JHS Three seeking admission into senior high school [SHS] One, that we looked at and we saw that these schools for a period of two or three years were having a high number of people wanting to enter those schools. That was the way we determined the popularity but we didn't go further to say that OK, let's then look at the criteria, but

anybody looking at them will know that they are the type of schools I'm talking about; they were there, they have already made the name for themselves. (GOP2)

I find the comments on the influence of parents in the SHS placement of their children, and their desire to see those children enrol in their alma mater particularly interesting. The examples of schools he mentioned are all Option 3 schools – the so-called well-endowed SHS. These are parents who have obviously moved up the social ladder and who feel that the SHS they graduated from gave them the necessary push to climb. A rather fascinating situation in Ghana is that people tend to be more attached to the upper secondary schools they graduated from than their former universities or other HEIs, and for that matter, old boys' and girls' associations of the SHS tend to be stronger than the alumni associations of the universities. But more importantly, it evinces the desire of the elite in society to maintain their hold on positions of influence in society.

This situation can, to a substantial extent, be explained by Lucas' (2004) concept of EMI particularly, postulate two, which holds that if qualitative differences are common in educational system, the socio-economically advantaged will obtain qualitative advantage (see Chapter Four). In the same vein, this finding however fails to support the MMI argument that suggests that if the demand of the upper classes for a given level of education is optimised, the link between education and social origin is muted (see Raftery & Hout, 1993), at least in the Ghanaian context. The opening up of secondary education in Ghana since the 1980s has resulted in the quest for more quality, prestigious education at that level by those from advantaged backgrounds, a fact GOP 2 referred to. Participants from the elite schools speak out:

Yes, it really does count. As I was saying your foundation counts, you go to a school in some village of a kind, where teachers are not really being motivated to work hard or just think, OK let me just come to class to (?), you won't get better education than you will get in Holy Child. For a school like Holy Child, they give a holistic manner of teaching not just about education, but how to carry yourself, and it comes to play when /. For instance, the interview [medical school], they don't just listen to your answers but how confident you are, and they say in Medicine you have to be confident...I think it's just not about education, when you go to such a school they give you a holistic kind of teaching too. (SP13, female, Medicine)

Oh yes, it does a lot, because you see even when you are going to the SHS they have grades in the schools and I happen to be in one of the very best schools [Holy Child] so you realise that most of the people there are very serious, the teachers there are very helpful and then we had a lot of facilities. So it really helped us because you go to other schools and they don't have libraries, they don't have laboratories, but then I remember my time we had a very new laboratory and everything was just good. (SP15, female, Nursing)

Yeah, it did. It did a lot because I had friends in other schools who were equally as good as I was when we were all in JHS but when they went to their various SHS because some didn't get what they wanted [SHS of choice] they didn't come out with good grades and some are still rewriting Nov/Dec [private WASSCE]. Your school actually counts because some schools if you are science student you have to have/, my school [Aburi Girls] we were very fortunate to have lab sessions. Although we had Form Four, Form Three

conflicts, teachers had to choose people to concentrate on; even with that, we still had time for practicals; Chemistry, all the exam you are well versed with the equipment. But for some schools, the day you write the practical exams is the very first day you are actually seeing [the equipment] so you will not even know how to write it. (SP11, female, Engineering)

SP13, SP15 and SP11 do also believe that the SHS they attended positively impacted their WASSCE grades and eventual enrolment in HE. One can easily identify some common threads in their comments; teachers, infrastructure and equipment with SP13 highlighting other skills other than book knowledge she gained from her school which has become an invaluable asset (further details on this issue later). The issue of teachers and infrastructure have become the most distinguishing features of the SHS leading to the well-endowed, less-endowed divide among the public SHS in Ghana. GOP2 highlighted this issue during our conversation. When I asked about efforts by government to close the resource-gap, he admitted it is an issue that is an uphill task for government:

Yeah, closing the resource-gap is a desire that GES has been longing to fill, but I'm afraid if we want to be honest with ourselves, it will take such a long time to close it, because these schools that I'm talking about have taken over 50 years to build the kind of infrastructure that they now have and these other schools that were started in the late 1980s are yet to. Moreover, those schools were made boarding institutions so the boys and the girls stay there and they do all kinds of things. These other schools that I'm talking about that are less-endowed are day-schools. And generally in Ghana, the day-schools tend to be performing less... (GOP2)

Apparently, it does not appear that the phenomenon of less-endowed schools is about to ease; a signal that there is no light at the end of the tunnel for students who enrol in such schools. As the students (SP13, SP15 and SP11) have argued about the teacher-infrastructure-academic excellence nexus, GOP2's comments further strengthen that of the students as he cites a case where a resource-rich school has become the toast of every girl aspiring for upper secondary education in Ghana. He also establishes the positive correlation between enrolling in a well-endowed school and high achievement in external examinations, at least in the Ghanaian context;

...let me give you an example, Wesley Girls. So many girls are choosing that, so we said that oh well probably because it's a girls' school, and some parents prefer pure girls' school to a mixed institution. But going beyond that we said OK there are other places, other girls' schools that are there, the girls' schools are not so many but there are other girls' schools why is it that it is that? Then you will see that, you go into the school you will see that they have the infrastructure, then you go beyond the infrastructure then you look at the teachers that they have, then you see that they have teachers, then you come back to the results and you look at it and you say, oh, this school is actually having that so possibly, the good performance that you are seeing is as a results of these [resources] that we [they] have. (GOP2)

As I hinted earlier, some students apart from SP13 who enrolled in the highly esteemed SHS reported that they got more than just academic knowledge from their respective institutions. SP4 recounts the influence:

Yes, it did [influence] because even in our daily activities they kept reminding us that we are studying to enter, further our studies in the university. So we were made to put in our best to enable us get there.

His comments prompted me to ask “so there was that aspiration and motivation?” to which he responded:

From the teachers and students in general. Sometimes when we meet we discuss the possible universities we want to attend, the courses we want to read in order to achieve our final careers that we want to pursue (SP4 male, Engineering).

SP7 and SP11 also reminisced:

In Aburi Girls we have good teachers, we have the / I was in a boarding school so the boarding conditions were suitable. Suitable learning conditions were also available and there was enough motivation because you meet a lot of students who are also good, who are studying, who are helping you; teachers were also ready to help us. I don't think many or any of the secondary schools in the rural communities has those opportunities, so that's what I think made the difference. (SP7, female, Business Administration)

I know of a school where they don't even use / most of the schools don't even use the answer sheets, and you know that the shading counts too, but my school [Aburi Girls] that's what we used from Form One to Form Three. So before you get there [WASSCE exams] you have also built up your confidence already because if you attend a school where there are no facilities, no teachers, nothing, your confidence level can be very low, so the school you attend also counts. But even if you make up your mind to study, even if you are the best in your school [less-endowed] your results won't be as good as mine because I would have it easy. If...you are studying under trees, some of these conditions don't shape your mind well for exam and they really affect your performance in the exam. (SP11, female, Engineering)

Apparently, these students are not oblivious of the challenges confronting their counterparts in the rural SHS. SP4 and SP7's comments about motivation from not only teachers but students are a pointer to the fact that the elite schools are predominantly peopled by the 'best and brightest' children who often have very high aspirations by virtue of the high cultural and social capital they have accumulated. The opposite is also true for the less-endowed schools where students whose grades from the BECE were not competitive enough to assure them a place in the elite SHS are channelled to.

SP16 shared his experience on the issue of low aspiration of students enrolled in the rural SHS from volunteering to mentor final year students in one such school with me:

I was in a Hall last year and we went out for an outreach in this school [name withheld] I had never been, a thick forest, just to advise the high school students. So we got there and because I was a General Arts student, I took a General Arts class. I entered the class and asked a question, that is those who completed this

year, by then they were in school. I asked them “how many of you are aspiring to be in the university?”, and one lady said “Oh yɛ hanom deɛ yɛnnkɔ university oo” [Oh this our place, we don’t go to university] and I asked “na mo kɔ hen?” [Then where do you go?]. She said: “ [Teacher] Training College and Nursing Training”. I said “Oh don’t say that because we can all apply for the university, if you believe in yourself and you sit down to study it will go on well with you”. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

Although, SP16’s claim could not be independently verified for practical reasons, it is very typical for rural students in Ghana to aspire to lower tier HEIs due to inadequate counselling and guidance and the notion that university education is expensive. The low aspiration of rural students appears to be pervasive; an issue that is also prevalent at the basic education level. SP18, a rural student, recounts how he defied the counsel of his teacher not to select a school in the urban area when he was making choices for placement in an upper secondary school. He eventually obtained Aggregate 10 in the BECE (exceptional performance from a rural student) and got admitted to a well-endowed, Option 3 school:

I quite remember when I was choosing school in 2009 (my secondary school), my teacher advised me that there is no way I’m going to get the secondary school because there are people in the towns that we are competing with them so I should just choose that local somewhere. Then I told myself that no, even if I was able to make it through that place, some people are also there [rural area] which of course when they advise them in that way they accept it and then they choose / even though they could have performed better and gone to those better schools they ended up going to those local or those small, small rural secondary schools, which of course it reduce their performances very well in their WASSCE as a whole. (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

SP11 and SP7 who attended the same school visibly show their sense of pride for their alma mater but what is even more important about the former’s comment is that she gives us an indication that the school started preparing them for the WASSCE exams right from the first year by giving them prototype answer sheets similar to what they would encounter during the school-leaving exams. It is often the case that rural schools do not have adequate resources for such purposes, and in some cases final year students do not even have the opportunity to use facilities like that during their mock exams.

Those reporting a negative influence of the schools they attended on their WASSCE results were found to be the ones who attended a less-endowed SHS and also hail from the rural and deprived communities. SP10 is one such student admitted to the university through the institution’s affirmative action programme. I asked if he recollects the results from the BECE to which he replied:

Yes, that time fortunately we were very few people that wrote. We were twelve in number of which that time I was the only person who was able to make it through that BECE, my grade was 28. (SP10, male, Economics).

The lowest cumulative aggregate for placing a BECE candidate in an upper secondary school in Ghana is Aggregate 30, so SP10's Aggregate 28, the best and only pass from his school (public JHS) as he claims, is by all 'standards' a very weak pass. In most of the private JHS in the cities, Aggregate Six is not only the norm, but candidates aspiring to enrol in schools like Wesley Girls, Aburi Girls, Holy Child, Mfantsipim should set their eyes on obtaining Grade 1 in all the subjects as the case of SP5, SP11, SP13, SP7 and others exemplify.

So with Aggregate 28, SP10 got admitted to a deprived SHS and obtained Aggregate 15 in the WASSCE after his upper secondary education, for which reason, he was considered for concessionary admission. This is how he summed up the performance of his year group in the WASSCE:

The year group actually the result was, in terms of percentages, it was not encouraging. I learnt it was 19 point something percent - those who passed with A1-C6. It wasn't encouraging in terms of the percentage but if you look at it some really passed just that they had failures in some of the courses like English and Core Maths and mostly if you fail one of those you are not considered... (ibid.)

His mention of Aggregate 15 prompted me to ask if he thought he could have performed better in the WASSCE if he had enrolled in a school that is regarded as well-endowed, to which he responded:

Actually, it could have made a difference in a way, yeah it could have made a difference because when I was in the school for instance, we were not having computer laboratories, dining hall, classrooms. Sometimes when we want to (study?) ourselves we used to sit under trees just to have lectures. It was the (?) years coming that they put up some structures, that one was in wooden structures of which we had to sit under there for classes but when we were getting to Form Four, that was the time they started putting up some structures which they didn't even complete; up till now some of them are still under completion. (SP10, male, Economics)

I put the same question to GP2 who was also admitted on affirmative action to the same university as that of SP10 and has since graduated not only with a First Class Honours, but also came out as the best graduating student in his department for the year group. Like SP10, he enrolled in a rural SHS with Aggregate 20 from the BECE but strove for Aggregate 12 in the WASSCE. His response, to a large extent, mirrors that of SP10:

Yeah, yeah if I had been in Mfantsipim⁶³ or something like that I would have performed more than this, because when I got the admission here as less-endowed to do Economics, I was even thinking that if I had money I could have even applied for Business Administration because that's my area of interest. So when there was no option than to just take this one, I decided to come here. So if the school [SHS attended] was to have high, high facilities that could have helped us to also be (inc.- low voice) like the high

⁶³ Mfantsipim School was the first secondary school to be established in the then Gold Coast (Ghana). It is a faith-based public SHS for boys established in 1876. Notable alumni include former UN Secretary-General and Nobel Prize Laureate Kofi Annan.

schools, I think it could have also helped me in some other way. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

The conditions under which SP10 and GP2 had their education contrast sharply with the likes of SP11, SP15, SP7, SP4, and SP16 among others. Indisputably, the playing field was not equal for the two sets of people. But for an adjustment made to the 'starting line' (see Crosby, 1994), SP10 and GP2 would not have been able to compete with their counterparts for admission to the university with the grades from the WASSCE as the sole criterion.

The educational authorities are indeed aware of the totally different experiences students from the well and less-endowed SHS go through as the comments of GP2 below indicates:

These other schools that I'm talking about that are less-endowed are day-schools, and generally in Ghana, the day-schools tend to be performing less; why? Because the students have less time to study, because why their friends get up in the morning and by 7:00 they are already sitting somewhere as a boarder, sitting somewhere reading the other student is still on his way looking for 'trotro'⁶⁴ to come. In the afternoon when they have closed and the other students are into clubs and into other study groups and doing all other things, the day-student is still on the way again going home looking for 'trotro' to go home. Evening prep, the day-student has no evening prep - organised evening prep. So you see that eventually, the day-student is less performing because of the inappropriate use of time. They are not able to, not that they don't want to study, but they don't even have the facilities to study, they don't get the encouragement, they don't even have masters [private tutors] in their homes to be able to encourage them like in the boarding system where prep, I mean preparation time is well organised and all kinds of activities are taking place. (GP2)

This scenario only goes to strengthen the position of Brink (2009) that regarding school-leavers whose parents could buy their way into good schools to be of higher merit than students who struggled in adverse circumstances just by virtue of their results from the school-leaving exam "seems a peculiarly narrow definition of the word 'merit'" (p.16).

Contrary to the views of SP11, SP15, SP7, SP4, and SP16 to the effect that the SHS they attended positively impacted their WASSCE grades, SP17 who also graduated from a well-endowed SHS like her colleagues is among those arguing for a neutral influence. She contends that her school only made a contribution to her success:

Yes, it [school] contributed a lot. I will say me getting here it's not solely dependent on the grades I made when I was in school. I wrote Nov/Dec [private exams] after school so that was also what helped me get here. But looking at it I don't think my school did anything extraordinary in helping me get the grades. (SP17, female, Law).

⁶⁴ Privately owned commercial vehicles used by commuters. It is the most popular means of transportation in Ghana.

I proceeded then to ask if she could have still put up a similar performance had she enrolled in a less-endowed SHS. SP17 put up this defence:

I see it as education; it depends on the person. You might be in a very good school but you get poor grades and you might be in a very poor school but you get really good grades so I think your results or your education depends on you (ibid).

When I put the same question to SP5, her answer was directly opposed to that of SP17 although their respective schools are all ranked as well-endowed or Option 3:

I don't think it would have been that easy, it would have required much effort because then with no teachers to explain further what you are reading, with no facilities to enhance your [?], I think it would have been very difficult (SP5, female, Biochemistry).

GP1 attended a SHS she describes as less-endowed citing the GES's own ranking of the school and the facilities available as the reasons. Her opinion however does not differ from SP17 although their experiences were totally different:

I believe that it [influence of the school] can be yes or no depending on the student also. Because, I think it's not all about the name of the school, but the student also. So I think my teachers then really taught us, they did their part everything...Probably if I had been in a good school it [grades] would have been better or it would have been worse. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

6.2 Procedural Justice

This section examines the fairness and transparency of the processes leading to the admission of applicants to HE – the fairness of the procedures. Supporters of meritocracy often ground their arguments on procedural justice and argue that the same rules should be applied to all individuals irrespective of their personal or socio-economic circumstances. Under this theme, participants were asked to report on these issues; (1) the number of application(s) they made before they gained admission; (2) whether or not the programme they are pursuing was one of choice or assigned by the university; (3) whether or not the admission requirements guarantee equal access to all applicants.

6.2.1 Application and Admission

Applications for admission to undergraduate programmes in public universities in Ghana are not done through any centralised agency as is the case at even the upper secondary level. Each university has the autonomy to organise its own admissions, deciding when to open and close applications and how much prospective students should purchase the admission form. As far as this study is concerned, the overwhelming majority (15) of the 17 students and graduates who responded to the question indicated that they applied only in one admission year. Only one participant (SP14) applied in two different admission years. Although she gained admission in the first year of application to two different public universities – UHAS established in 2011 and the UDS in 1992, she refused to take up the admission offers for Computer Science and Doctor of Medical Laboratory Sciences by the respective institutions, the reason being that she wanted to pursue a

degree in Medicine. In the following year, she applied to do the same programmes she had refused at KNUST but could not be admitted, and therefore, settled for her third choice programme (Chemical Engineering).

GP2, however, did not buy any admission form and had not even dreamt of pursuing university education although he was duly qualified, but an affirmative action programme of the university he later graduated from made the impossible possible for him. This was how he told his story when I asked the number of times he applied to the university before he gained admission:

Actually, where I'm coming from is less-endowed so when I completed SHS, I bought polytechnic, that's C [Cape Coast]-Poly so I had the admission. So one week I was going to pay my fees and I had a call from the school [former SHS] that I have received some letter so I should go there for the letter, and when I went there it was KNUST; that they are helping some less-endowed schools so I have been admitted there so I have to come for the letter and one week time I have to pay the fees, if I don't pay the fees within one week time the scholarship [admission] they will take it away. So I took the letter from the headmaster and I came here [KNUST] with my parents to pay the fees, we did everything then I started school. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

Still baffled by his account, I pressed further to know why he did not purchase any application form to enrol in any university having obtained Aggregate 12 – excellent by virtue of the calibre of school attended – in the WASSCE exams. He clarified:

Because there was no money in the family. There was no money because even after buying the polytechnic [form] I was thinking of how to pay the school fees; yeah I was thinking of how to pay the school fees. Even the money that I used to buy the, this thing, [form] was from my own pocket. Yeah, so I was thinking after the forms, I was thinking about how I was going to get money to pay the fees. (ibid)

GP2 was not the only individual who could have potentially been barred from attaining university education because he could not even clear the first hurdle of purchasing admission forms, SP2, a student with disability had a similar experience:

Truly speaking, I didn't have a choice. Though there are other public universities around - there is UST [KNUST], UEW, UCC and other public universities. I could have bought the forms to those schools but the only money I had is what I used to buy Legon [UG] forms, so I could have even bought multiple forms but I didn't have the funds. All I had was what I used to buy Legon forms and I just had to pray towards it that I had it, because if I hadn't gotten admission to UG, by this time I don't know where I would have been; maybe somewhere farming. (SP2, male, Political Science)

The case of GP2 and SP2 is no different from that of Olivia and Isaac (see Chapter Four) – very brilliant students for whom the doors of universities had been 'shut' because they did not even have the means to purchase admission forms.

The same can be said of Peter who after obtaining seven Grade A1s in the WASSCE applied to do his dream programme (Medicine) so as to become a doctor and serve his

community: "I always wanted to become a doctor to treat children because of my own experience. I was taken to hospital once when I was a child, only for us to discover there was no doctor at post. Upper West needs doctors". But the dream is becoming a mirage because he cannot pay the fees to take up the offer of admission. Despite gaining admission to the UDS Medical School, Peter had to assist his mother on a farm bequeathed to her by his late father. This is a student who even struggled to raise funds to buy the application form: "My mother sacrificed everything to enable me to buy the admission forms at GHC 120 [US\$ 35] last year. I was only hoping that a miracle would happen and I would find myself in school. But it didn't happen, although I qualified for the medical school" (Daily Graphic, 2015)⁶⁵⁶⁶.

The experiences of GP2, SP2 and the likes of Olivia, Isaac and Peter contrast sharply with that of others in the study. 13 student-participants for this study reported on whether or not they applied to more than one university for admission with 10 of them sending multiple applications. SP14 for instance, applied to four universities in Ghana and two universities abroad. While the poor and vulnerable use all their means to purchase a single application form and expect a miracle or luck (see the accounts of GP2, SP2 and Peter) to locate them, those from advantaged backgrounds broaden their scope and choice through the power of the purse. Applying to multiple institutions is also seen as a form of insurance against staying at home for another year should an application to a single institution fails as SP4 pointed out when I quizzed him on why he applied to two different universities:

OK they both have different requirements and it was basically just trying to see which of them could accept you because, as at our time the results were not ready so they took the results straight from WAEC so we just applied. So it was kind of insuring our entrance into a university at all cost. (SP4 male, Engineering).

Only three student-participants for this study including SP2 did not apply to multiple universities and the reasons for not doing so were basically financial.

These findings reveal that for students with low SES, at least as far this study goes, the application process alone presents a significant challenge, and as a consequence, an otherwise brilliant and talented student can potentially be excluded from the pursuit of university education. Such students will either not aspire to HE at all or when they do, settle for a lower tier HEI as the case of GP2 illustrates, while those who defy all odds to apply may still find substantial impediments on their way and eventually dropout.

⁶⁵ <http://graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/38515-shs-graduate-s-dream-career-in-limbo-could-not-attend-medical-school-for-lack-of-funds.html>

⁶⁶ At the time of finalising this report, the President of the Republic of Ghana had directed the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund) to offer Peter a full scholarship to pursue his studies. With the admission offer lost, the UDS has indicated its willingness to re-admit Peter to the Medical School. Who knows how many of the likes of Peter are groping in the dark, who might not be fortunate enough to have the media draw the attention of the public to their plight?
<http://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/38640-president-directs-getfund-to-support-master-banoebuuri.html>

6.2.2 Fields of Study: Choice, Assignment and the Fee-paying Option

During the application process, applicants are at liberty to choose the programmes they want to pursue in order of preference. Typically, the applicant has four choices and they are considered for their first choice programme based on the cut-off point for the programme in question. In some cases, applicants who are unable to stand the stiff competition for their first choice programmes are considered for their second or third choice programmes if their cumulative grade point is 'strong enough'. It is however, not unusual for the public universities to assign programmes to students which they did not even choose, and it will then be up to the applicant to accept or reject the offer.

During the interview, therefore, I asked both the student and graduate-participants whether or not the programmes they are pursuing or pursued were of choice (dream programme of study) or assigned to them by the university as the case may be. 11 of the 15 interviewees who responded to the question had programmes of their choice but only five out of the 11 actually got their first-choice programmes. While those who got their dream programmes were obviously excited about it those who got the second or third choice were not as motivated. This is how some of those in the former category expressed their feelings when asked how they felt about it;

"Very good, very grateful to God" (SP2, male, Political Science).

"I felt really good" (SP17, female, Law).

Those in the latter category also did not hide their feelings. With five As and three Bs from the WASSCE, SP5 chose Medicine as the first preference but failed to get in and had to settle for Biochemistry. She was offered admission by another university in a programme she would have loved to pursue but could not take up the offer because it was a 'full' fee-paying programme:

The admission I had at Tech [KNUST] was fee-paying but this one was regular so I came here... I was offered two courses actually; Biological Sciences as regular and then fee-paying for Doctor of Optometry, and then here [UG] I had Biochemistry as a regular student, so I settled for the Biochemistry. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

Public universities in Ghana admit students who are able to get into the programmes through the competitive cut-off points as 'regular'. Regular students pay fees (user-charges) subsidised by government. There is also an option for those who cannot get in as regular but have at least the minimum entry requirement to enrol as full fee-paying students on condition that they can pay the full fees. It is impossible however to switch from a full fee-payer to a regular student status. Both category of students attend the same lectures and are taught by the same academic staff as an integrated class.

This is how SP5 reacted to the situation; "For now I'm OK, yeah, I'm OK". Now in the second year, she indicated that if after the first degree the Biochemistry is OK she will stick to it, otherwise she will still pursue her dream. But she is not alone, SP1 had also

applied to do Law in her university, but from her own account, was assigned something different:

I had always wanted to be a lawyer and I told you I applied to two universities. I chose Economics at UCC and then Law here but I didn't get it because of the grade limitation. Let's say if my Dad had money, he could have afforded the fee-paying thing and I would have been able to do the Law but because there is no money I just have to take what the University gave me, and then maybe in future I will still do what I want to do. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

Now in the third year of the programme SP1 seems to have put that behind her and has come to love what was offered her:

OK initially I wasn't very comfortable, but right now, let's say I have grown to love what I'm doing so I appreciate it (ibid).

SP11 who had the same grade point as SP5 rather seemed not to have had enough time to raise the funds for the fee-paying admission offer;

...when I had Tech [KNUST], I had Pharmacy fee-paying and I was told to come on Friday, and I was told to come and pay 70 million [GHC 7,000 approximately US\$ 2,017.00] on Monday, and there is no way you can raise 70, over a weekend just like that, you see... (SP11 female, Engineering).

The story of SP5, SP1 and SP11 differ from that of SP15 and SP13. SP15 scored Aggregate 15 from the WASSCE and confessed she did not perform well:

I'm actually a fee-paying student because I didn't really get that much grade... I actually wanted to do Dentistry but then I also chose Nursing. Because I didn't get the Dentistry I had Nursing so I decided to go with it. (SP15, female, Nursing).

The cut-off point for the BSc Nursing Programme for SP15's institution in the year she was admitted was Aggregate Seven (see Table 5), but with Aggregate 15 she was still able to get in because her parents could afford the fee-paying option.

As stated before, SP13 could not pass the Medical School entrance exams despite having made six As and two Bs in the WASSCE, but her dream was not aborted because she could still fall back to the fee-paying option;

...when I wrote my exam and I didn't do well, they [parents] still paid for me to be a fee-paying student (SP13, female, Medicine).

It is rather hard to justify the case of SP15 for instance as one in which procedural justice was done, having regard to the fact that other applicants with aggregates between eight and 14 may have been denied admission. Examining this issue from the lens of Leventhal's (1980) six criteria for fairness allocations (see Chapter Three), such a case would arguably fail the suppression of bias and the consistency across time and person elements of the criteria.

For clarity and a deeper understanding, I asked an official of the NCTE as to whether or not there is a level-playing field for all Ghanaian students irrespective of their SES, to access HE. This is how he responded:

Hmm, what is happening more and more; it's appearing that if you don't have money there are certain courses you may not be able to do because this 10% we have set ourselves for fee-paying students the institutions don't abide by them. Unfortunately, we don't even check...and see whether we have data on fee-paying students. For a programme like say Medicine, the institutions are making it more and more fee-paying; more and more fee-paying, then you ask yourself, you say those who are fee-paying also enter on some form of concessionary enrolment so that means if you don't have money and you have the same grades with the same person you cannot, as far as he can, you will be left out. Our provision in Ghana is about one of the few countries; I don't know whether there is any other country that pursues such a policy. So the field is level to some extent. And also for certain courses, it is becoming more and more fee-paying, for certain courses like say Medicine. For example, University of Cape Coast Medicine is completely fee-paying, completely fee-paying and then Legon [University of Ghana] it's expected that about 10%, but if you go there you will see that about 50% of them - that is those in Medical School are fee-paying. The same applies to I think [Business?]. But it's open for courses that students don't pursue, students don't prefer. (GOP3)

Apparently, GOP3's comments draw attention to how the fee-paying policy is gradually deepening social stratification in Ghanaian HE and the obvious 'non-reaction' from the supervisory body to ensure that the HEIs stay within the '10%' stipulated by the policy for fee-paying admissions. In fact, the NCTE's own policy document reveals that as far the enrolment quota of fee-paying students is concerned, it is currently pegged at 5% as the norm and the public universities are expected to abide by that (NCTE, 2012: 2). There are however proposals to get the 5% trebled: "The enrolment quota of Ghanaian 'fee-paying students' should increase from 5% to 15%...The enrolment of foreign students should be raised from 5% to 15% "(NCTE, 2014: 11). The upshot of this is that if these proposals are implemented, 30% of undergraduate admissions each year would be set apart for fee-paying; making an already competitive grade-based admissions overly competitive and meritocratic. If indeed equity of access is a matter of concern to government, then the unrestrained expansion of the fee-paying quota deserves a reconsideration.

As a follow-up, I asked GOP3 if he did not think that the HEIs were using the fee-paying option to shore up the decreasing financial allocations from government. He rebutted:

Well, they come with money but nothing suggests that academics have improved; that educational/ if I say standards I don't mean outcomes. Standards in the sense of student-teacher ratios, have they improved? Well, even if; yes, you get the money but where does the money go? So it hasn't [led to] improvement in the outcomes of tertiary education or even improvements in some minimum standards...have they hired more teachers, have they set up more laboratories? If that is done, then the charges become justifiable. But you see tertiary education in most countries is done such that the best student; if one course is preferred by everybody, those, the best student goes for it but it's not exactly the same here. But though Medicine is very competitive, so first of all they give places to; they have a quota for those who pay but even that one is still very, very competitive you also have to get very high grades, but the point is what about those who

also have very high grades but cannot pay? So we should have some loan [schemes?] that could have allowed people to also access courses of their choice. (ibid.)

His question about the fairness of the fee-paying admission procedure in respect of the circumstances of the bright and needy is an important one, but the evidence available does point to government's propping of the HEIs to use the fee-paying admission option as an income-generating venture. Equity then risks being sacrificed for efficiency, a fact GOP3's question points to.

SP16 had also set his eyes on Law: "For me I preferred offering Law; I wanted to study Law". He had Political Studies and although he did not take it kindly, he has not abandoned his dream:

Actually, it wasn't good but I went forward, I asked some people who are in higher positions. Looking at Law for instance, you can have a first degree and switch into the Law School. I know of Makola [Ghana School of Law] so someone told me gaining admission for Political Studies, I can have Political Studies and after that I apply in the Makola School of Law so that is what I'm up to now. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

SP16 will actually be disappointed to learn that he cannot pursue Law at the Ghana School of Law with his Bachelor of Arts in Political Studies, since the institution is a professional one for those who already hold the Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and would want to practise as lawyers in Ghana. He would have to enrol in a first degree Law programme first to qualify for the Ghana School of Law.

The five who were assigned courses seem just to be getting by with what was given them while others pushed for a change. SP10 admitted through affirmative action was assigned History, and although he was not happy with it, the excellent performance he put up in the first year enabled him to effect a change:" ...I was actually given BA History which I have changed to BA Economics just this semester" (SP10, male, Economics).

I was not satisfied because initially I wanted to do Geography, Psychology and maybe Information Studies but when it came they gave me Economics, Information Studies and Theatre Arts. So I was not really happy but I had to go along with it. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies).

SP8 who is obviously unhappy is in the second year of the four-year degree programme and intends to pursue the Information Studies as his major. I asked him what he thought might have occasioned the assignment of the programmes. He speculated:

Actually, our batch we were two batches that completed from the SHS so there was tight competition; the gap was very small so I think because of that we weren't able to get what we wanted, it's what was available that we had, so I think that might be the cause. (ibid.)

SP8 makes reference to a national education reform and policy that has directly impacted the fortunes of students. The duration of upper secondary school in Ghana has actually

been a political contest between the two dominant political parties, and has oscillated between three and four years. The PNDC Government (NDC from 1992) which phased out the five-year secondary school system leading to the award of the GCE Ordinary Level Certificate and the two years of Sixth-Form education leading to the GCE Advanced Level Certificate, replaced it with a three-year upper secondary – senior secondary school (SSS) which qualified applicants for admission to the university directly. However, the 2007 education reforms under the auspices of the NPP Government increased the duration by an additional year and changed the name from SSS to SHS, supposedly to give students and teachers ample time to complete the syllabuses and prepare for the school-leaving exams. When the NDC returned to power in 2009, the government reverted the duration to the pre-2007 duration of three years although the reform had not even run a single cycle.

As a consequence, the year 2013 saw two batches of students completing upper secondary in Ghana (those who enrolled for the four-year programme and those who did the three years) with both streams competing for space in the universities. With the limited space available, potential entrants who could have been admitted in a normal admission year were turned away creating a backlog of applicants since those who couldn't get in would reapply with the next graduating batch in the hope that they will be admitted. In fact, more than half of the 92,500 SHS graduates who applied for admission in three of the public universities (UG, KNUST and UHAS) were turned away with 17,000 (35%) out of the 48,000 who applied to UG and 10,000 (24%) out of the 42,000 seeking admission to KNUST, being successful (Daily Graphic, 2013)⁶⁷. The situation, nonetheless, offered an opportunity for the private HEIs to increase their intake of those students who can afford private HE.

6.2.3 Fair and Equal Access

As expected, the question as to whether or not the admission requirements for undergraduate programmes in the public universities guarantee equal and fair access to all applicants proved a divisive one. The 18 student and graduate-participants gave their opinions on the issue with six claiming it is fair and 12 asserting that the admission system is unfair. Three of the 12, however, thought that although it is unfair it is still justifiable so we can live with it.

The participants belonging to the *fair* group, were in the main, students who attended the well-endowed SHS and are currently enrolled in the most selective programmes:

It's, it's sort of is; because the cut-off, the aggregate you need some are not too high. I think the least for UG is I think 24, you shouldn't get more than C6 and I think if you go to a school that is deprived that doesn't mean you get a D or an E or an F. You can still force, there are people who went to schools if you mention you will not, you don't even know whether the town is even in Ghana or not but they are here and they are doing

⁶⁷ <http://graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/6808-admission-crisis-as-thousands-scramble-for-limited-vacancies.html> (02 October, 2013).

very well, First Class students, yes. So maybe I think it's fair considering how the grading is. (SP11, female, Engineering)

So SP11 believes the procedure is fair since it judges all individuals by the same standards and certain individuals who studied in very challenging circumstances were still able to succeed, an indication, in her opinion, of the fairness of the treatment. SP16 also responded; "it's fair, it's fair" to the same question so I asked "how?", to which he offered this defence:

Because we all study the same syllabus and not because of your lighting [electricity] problem; because you don't have books or classroom to study, because of that your cut-off or your requirement should be different from others, it can't be so. (SP16, male, Political Studies).

The thrust of the argument of SP11 and SP16 is that attending a deprived school should not necessarily lead to poor grades and that the poor infrastructure and teaching and learning conditions do not just justify differential treatment in admissions. SP16 in particular is calling for a uniform admission procedure and equality – the very hallmarks of procedural justice (see Figure 2). Although they both admit the turf is unequal, SP16 strongly argues that the issue is outside the remit of the universities:

Not level [playing field]. Although, that's what I'm trying to say that they can do something about it, the universities can't do something about the requirements (ibid.).

I think it does [guarantees equal access]. But because for some courses like Agric Science, even generally somebody with an Aggregate of 24 can be allowed to enter the university but because of the population and the number of people that want to enter university in a given year, makes it, increases the bar like as in, you have to get a better aggregate to be able to enter the university. So even though the university is open for people to enter up to Aggregate 24 because of the population and then the lack of the facilities on the side of the universities they are not able to make it. (SP4 male, Engineering)

Yes, it provides equal opportunity so far as UG, the system, every subject and the requirement so if you are able to meet that requirement you get a course to do, no matter where you are from, you get a course you want to study (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies).

Like SP11, SP4 and SP8 also defend the current system arguing that so long as you meet the minimum entry requirement, you get a cap that fits you, that is to say, if you cannot get admitted to the most sought after programmes, there are others that fit your results. SP8 highlights equality of opportunity in respect of the competition being 'fair' to all irrespective of their backgrounds as proponents of procedural justice and strict meritocracy often argue (see Sigal & Tienda, 2007; Rescher, 1966; Deutsch, 1975). He also agrees with SP11 and SP16 that rural students did not have the opportunities that their privileged counterparts had at the upper secondary level, but he rather contends that once the two sets of individuals meet at the HE level, they are presented with the same opportunities and at that point the former tend to outclass the latter. But the

question as to how disadvantaged students can enter without some affirmative action, to take advantage of the equal playing field available at the level of HE SP8 and others make reference to, remains unanswered:

No, they don't have the same opportunities, but once they are in the same institution or once they meet in the same institution they have equal opportunities but from their background they never had the same opportunities. But mostly those from areas where they did not have that opportunity but were able to make it to the university, they end up performing better than those who had the facilities at hand because they know where they are from so they try to put in a lot more effort. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

SP12 also submits that the admission procedure treats every individual fairly. In a rather fatalistic tone, she provides economic reasons to justify why rural students may be excluded:

Fairly. In Ghana, those who are from the rural areas are termed as those who don't have money...If they are not given the opportunity or actually they are allowed to come, some of the fees that are required here some of them can't pay and that will be a burden on the university... And also, I think they should make an external examination requirement for them so that when they come, and if they come, and they pass the exam and they see that they are good then they can help them financially. (SP12, female, Architecture)

Her argument therefore is that because the rural students also double as the poor who cannot afford university education, they may be left out because even if they are admitted they may not be able to survive. She would rather have such students screened again through another examination before such students are supported financially.

The findings also reveal that those who claimed the admission process was fair and who also happen to have enrolled in their programmes of study with very high cut-off points were very protective of their domains. They believe that admitting students with 'inferior' grades than what they enrolled with will lower the prestige of their respective programmes.

SP14 was admitted to the Chemical Engineering programme with Aggregate 10, so I asked if she would be willing to accept another student with Aggregate 20 into her programme, to which she objected although she admits the WASSCE itself is not a good measure of competence:

It depends. They want qualified people; people who are brilliant because I think pertaining to the subject it's quite difficult, so if you are very brilliant you will be able to do it, the pressure and everything. But sometimes, the WASSCE result doesn't really matter, because someone will be very capable, but because that's the system (inc.-low voice) ...

SP4 in a different university from that of SP14 was admitted with Aggregate 11, and like SP14 I asked if he would allow someone with Aggregate 24 to join his programme. His reasoning was quite similar to that of SP14:

Well, if, it depends. If there is more room for people to be admitted the person can join. But this is the perception, the general perception is that if you get high scores from the high school level, it is assumed that you are brilliant, you are capable of handling certain programmes, so if there is more room to take, the person can be allowed. But at the UG, 24, you cannot be taken. I think the least that can be taken for Engineering programme is 14 and then 16 for the females. (SP4, male, Engineering)

Having enrolled with Aggregate Six, SP7 asserts that those with Aggregate 15 have no business whining about the requirements for her programme;

... I don't think someone with 15 should also be complaining that it's not fair because it looks like your grade you made is just too far from what the University wants (SP7, female, Business Administration).

SP11 also believes that students who cannot make the cut-off point are just not serious. She enrolled with Aggregate Nine:

There is a cut-off, the cut-off for Materials Engineering is 15, so I don't see why you can't make the 15 if you are very serious student; you should be able to make the 15. And then, for Biomedical and Computer it's 10 so maybe that's when it won't be, if they could lower it...if the person has 20, you still have to pick the person but the school [university] is also looking to having, like, picking the best, you see; they also want to bring out the best people because there is no point in enrolling you and failing you, and sacking you. (SP11, female, Engineering)

Clearly, these students (SP4, SP14, SP7 and SP11) construe high grades from the WASSCE as evidence of merit, capability and a guarantee of excellent academic performance in the future, and for that matter, do not think that others with lower grades are a good fit for their respective programmes. With all these students enrolled in programmes regarded as prestigious, they may see the opening of the gates to the 'less brilliant' a threat to the prestige of their programmes and career prospects. There is no denying the fact that fields of study and their selectivity or otherwise, impact occupational opportunities and come with different economic pay-offs (Marini & Fan, 1997; Davies & Guppy, 1997; Clark, 1983; Ayalon & Yogev, 2005; Gaeber & Schaefer, 2004). The behaviour of these students further supports Lucas' (2001) claim that advantaged groups will seek qualitative advantages in HE when the quantitative advantages are being eroded.

The *unfair* group of participants who formed the majority opined that the current admission system does not guarantee fair or equal access to all applicants. One interesting find is that all the participants who entered university from the schools categorised as less-endowed believe that the current system is unfair. Their stance contrasts with their counterparts from the elite SHS who argue for the fairness of the system as the comments of SP10, GP2 and GP1 below indicate:

Actually, to all applicants, it is not fair to me. Because some people if you look at their results they do get almost all of them 'A' but one course for instance mostly Mathematics, English most people do get problem with that because they [educational authorities] have the general belief that you should pass A1-C6 in the WASSCE. That has put some people at home, they have to re-write or they have to go other institutions that accept their, this thing [grades]. (SP10, male, Economics)

It's not fair, to me it's not fair. Because I think when it comes to this institution for instance, if you are to consider those people from the poor or less-endowed SHS you get a few people but those from the high [elite] schools you get a lot of people. So it's not fair because certain criteria are not taken into consideration. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate).

Oh per what we've discussed so far, it's not fair. Yeah, because of the less-endowed issue here and there. I think they can give two; that this is the normal cut-off point but this is also for the less-endowed, aha; they can make that concession for them so that at least they can also be in the university. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

GP1 would rather have two sets of admission criteria for students from the well-endowed SHS and those from the less-endowed schools. SP18 who describes himself largely as a rural person and "fortunate", who made it to a well-endowed school "by the grace of God" is very much aware of the plight of rural students and quite empathetic to their cause. He responded to my question on fairness; and referring to the infrastructural gap, argued strongly that students in the rural schools "are being cheated":

Well, I was fortunate and I attended GSTS which has two Chemistry labs, two Physics lab and then a Biology lab. But then, I was fortunate to visit a friend who attended a school at Nzema area, [name withheld] and then I was passing by and I saw their lab and it's like someone is selling something on a table. So you could see that some can even be Science students; which of course, they might even be hearing about a certain instrument but they have not even seen it before. And then I quite remember I asked a friend, has he seen a litmus paper before? And then he said that: "no". So you see that the gap between the well / because, it's like this is how the educational system has become, the government is only looking, or I don't know, but those in charge are only looking up to those who are performing well, so you go to maybe Presec and they are having everything but then those in the villages are those who are not performing well. Instead of the government to look to them and then build that sector too, because we are all Ghanaians and then our all futures too are at stake. So I do believe that those people who are in the lesser schools are being cheated; yeah, I will say that they are being cheated. So I believe they should correct that aspect also. (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

Radical as the view of SP18 may seem, there is an admission of the arguments he raised even in the Ministry of Education as GP1 concedes:

Well, it is true that the rural schools are very much disadvantaged. But the point is this; the universities themselves have realised it so they have put in place certain measures to give some sort of admission to students from very deprived areas.... In spite of performances of students from very deprived areas, most often than not, they are considered over and above students from other institutions that are located in urban

areas. So that one is also there to actually ensure some sort of equity in the student distribution in our tertiary institutions. So if you look at it; I mean it's a very good form of ensuring that as many students as possible from very deprived areas also gain access to tertiary institutions. (GOP1)

He makes reference to affirmative action as a way of equalising opportunities for rural students which he terms "some sort of admission" ensuring "some sort of equity"; however, the claim that rural students are considered over and above their urban counterparts in admission is hard to accept and does not seem to be supported by the facts (see Figure 7a & 7b for example). Apart from students from the rural schools who see the current system as unfair, the students with disabilities (SP1 & SP2) also alleged procedural mistreatment in admissions (details in the disability section).

The third group of 'unfair' participants were those who regard the admission system as unfair and yet call for the maintenance of the status quo. It is fascinating that these students – from the well-endowed SHS now enrolled in selective programmes - who claim the system is unfair, and as a consequence, does not guarantee all students equal access to university education in Ghana, would still want the status quo preserved. Once again, this gives one a sense of how those in the advantaged strata in society would still want to have the sway on the opportunity pie, although doing so blights the chances of the underprivileged.

OK it's not all that fair. I learnt there are schools, like they don't even have teachers. So, I don't know, this is the issue of the government and not the university but the government should make sure that we are all satisfied with some level of education, the university has no problem with this. (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

Opportunity being equal? I will say no, because the conditions surrounding the learning processes are different. So then if one person is getting more facilities and more resources and another person is not, and you give them the same opportunity [requirements] definitely it's not so equal; there will be some form of imbalances but then I don't know if there is anything that can be done about it. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

Considering, as you said, the student who is not from a good school, who is from that rural area; maybe he has to go to farm for almost like, half of the day and go to school for like, a quarter of the day, it's not fair but I think that's Ghana university for you. (SP7, female, Business Administration)

Not really, it's not very fair, but then there some people who go to 'Fabɔɔdeɛbetomechɔk'⁶⁸ and then still make very good grades (SP13, female, Medicine).

To gain a fuller picture of the admission processes in the public universities in Ghana, I asked an official of one of the case institutions to take me through the procedures from the time the institution advertises the sale of application forms to the point when students are admitted. He submits:

⁶⁸ An imaginary typical village written in the Akan language.

What we do is this. The process starts immediately we finish one admission process, and the admission process, actually at my end, finishes when we've done matriculation. As soon...as we finish matriculation, we start the next process which is writing to the departments; because sometimes some departments will have some little changes in their admission requirements, for instance. So we write to them if they have any changes then they give us that information and then we use that one to prepare the entry requirements - the general entry requirements and then the specific requirements - for each programme; we prepare that one. Once we are able to finish with that one, we prepare it alongside the forms that they complete. Once we are able to complete those ones and we are sure everything is set, then we come out with advertisement for applicants to apply. That is, this one is done purely for local students because with international students you don't need forms, all you need to do is to pay the processing fee wherever you are because we do it online. (HOP3)

Prior to the call for application, HOP3 disclosed that the Executive Committee of the University meets annually to decide on what he calls 'quotas' (the number to be admitted) for the various programmes on offer in the University. The Admissions Committee is guided by the quotas decided on by the Executive Committee. The quotas are determined by the vacancies available and declared by the departments, and influenced by the student-teacher ratios, lecture rooms and other facilities. The Executive Committee reserves the right to either increase the quotas declared by the departments after it has done its own assessment of the human and material resources available.

I further asked to be schooled about the cut-off points, the buzzword which has become the reference point for all discussions on admissions in the public universities by the stakeholders. Specifically, I asked if the cut-off points were static:

No, the cut-off points are not static and what I tell people is that cut-off points are determined based on two main things; one is the quota for the programme and then, two the performance of the year group. These are the things that determine the cut-off for a particular programme. So based on these two scenarios, the cut-off points vary from time to time; sometimes it will remain constant for some time and sometimes it varies; either it becomes tough or it reduces a little. (ibid)

So basically, the vacancies that have been declared, to a large extent, determine who gets a seat in the programme. It then becomes a battle of who has the best and highest grades from the school-leaving exam as HOP3 will later reveal. It is my considered opinion that a third factor – the number to be admitted to the fee-paying option and such like - also explains the cut-offs. Still on the subject of cut-off points, I asked if it was his outfit that determines them or there is also a board for that. He explained:

The cut-off is / the issue is that it's like nobody determines it; it is systematic [automated]. Let me give you this scenario. What happens is that if we want to admit students to our Medical School or say Electrical Engineering, what we do is that we put all the people who select Electrical Engineering together, then we look at the quota that Engineering wants to take, then we go into the computer, and say, look, all these applicants want to do Electrical Engineering; Electrical Engineering wants to pick 150 students, can you pick the best 150? The computer picks it and when it gets to 150 it ends, then that becomes the cut-off. So it's like it is automatically determined by the system, nobody will determine that we will cut-off at this or that, no! It is based, just

using those two variables - the quota and then the performance of the year group. (HOP3)

His reference to computerisation and automation of the admission process prompted me to ask if there was no human agency to the process. HOP3 then clarified:

We have Admissions Committee (AC), but then the AC is guided by what the system generates. You see, for instance, let me explain. If the system is given the quota and then the results of the students that the system wants to pick, it will tell you that, look, if I pick best six [subjects] we will get this number of students, so the system will look at it, then tell us that if we pick the best six [Aggregate Six] maybe if we want 150 we will be getting 120 students so we tell the system to maybe, best six Aggregate Seven. When the system goes in, it will tell you that if we go to Aggregate Seven, we will get this number of students or that number of students, so that is what we look at if we get that. If it's such that the next step will give us the number, we require then we will allow it to go to seven if not then we end at six. And I must say that we have different categories of students that we admit, so for instance if we want to admit 150, and we get to Aggregate Six and we get 120 students, we end there because we have other category of students we want to admit. We will come to them as we move along, because we realise that we have international students who don't come under that, we have students we admit from the less-endowed schools, which is in a way we have to relax the criteria a little for them, we have students that we admit from other institutions locally but they write international exams like 'A'-Level, Baccalaureate. So if we get the 120 and we have a gap of 30, the remaining 30 will be filled by these other category of applicants, then we get our 150, and it ends there. So if you go into our records, the cut-off will be Aggregate Six for Medicine. (ibid.)

Table 5 shows the trends in the cut-off points at KNUST for some of the programmes on offer. The lower the score — which represents the aggregate score from the applicant's best six subjects — the more selective the study programme is, and vice-versa. For the 2013/14 academic year for example, the less selective Bachelor of Arts programmes were Painting and Sculpture and Akan (Ghanaian Language) with cut-off points at Aggregate 20, while the BSc Post Harvest Technology and BSc Dairy and Meat Science and Technology admitted applicants with up to Aggregate 24. These programmes often attract very few applicants so those who meet the minimum entry requirements easily gain admission. Despite HOP3's argument that the performance of each batch of graduates from the SHS determines the cut-off points, Table 6 again indicates that the cut-off points have remained virtually the same for the highly selective programmes. Thus, one can safely conclude that the de facto cut-off for programmes like Pharmacy, Medicine and Aerospace Engineering is Aggregate Six, meaning that the applicant must have scored Grade A1 in three core and three elective subjects taken in the WASSCE.

A cursory look at this process might lead to the conclusion that it indeed guarantees equal opportunity for access since the admissibility or otherwise of any applicant is judged by the same criterion or criteria for selection. But as HOP3 pointed out, the admission of other category of students by a different criterion can be fouled for breaching the consistency of procedure across persons' rule. Bias would not have been suppressed in this instance also. The case of SP15 who gained admission into the Nursing programme

with Aggregate 15 as a fee-paying student when the cut-off point for the year in question was Aggregate Seven, once more, readily comes to mind. Again, the admission of students from the less-endowed SHS which according to HOP3's own account also demands that the criteria be relaxed somewhat. This can equally be seen as a case of procedural injustice for those applicants who do not belong to that category, at least, judging from the meritocratic point of view. Although it ensures equity of opportunity and distributive justice it fails the equality of opportunity test. These findings confirm the arguments of Rawls (1972) and Solum (2004) that the notion of pure procedural justice is illusive.

Table 5: Cut-off Points for Select First Degree Programmes (ISCED 6) at KNUST

	Programme	2006/07	2011/12	2013/14
1	Bachelor of Laws (LL.B)	09	07	06
2	Doctor of Optometry	07	06	07
3	BSc Business Administration	07	07	07
4	Doctor of Pharmacy	07	06	06
5	BSc Actuarial Science	09	07	08
6	BSc Electrical Engineering	07	07	07
7	BSc Petroleum Engineering	08	06	06
8	Bsc Aerospace Engineering	06	06	07
9	BSc Nursing	08	08	07
10	BSc Human Biology (Medicine)	06	06	06
11	BSc Architecture	10	09	09
12	BA Economics	10	12	12
13	BA Publishing Studies	10	10	08
14	BA Political Studies	12	14	14
15	BA Culture & Tourism	11	15	12

Sources: Based on data from KNUST website for the respective years.

6.3 Affirmative Action

Under this section, the participants shared their opinions on treating females and students from the less-endowed SHS differently with respect to university admissions. Unlike other HE systems like India and South Africa, where affirmative action policies were initiated, and to a large extent, supervised by government, the situation in Ghana is entirely different. The study found that the HEIs themselves have gone out of their way to institute affirmative action policies to admit under-represented students without any prodding from the government. All the two case study institutions (UG and KNUST) have affirmative action admission policies initiated at different times and implemented in different ways. The UG, for example, admits female applicants to its humanities programmes, one grade point lower than their male applicants. Thus, for example, if the cut-off point for male applicants into BA History was Aggregate 14 in a particular year, a

female applicant with Aggregate 15 would still be admitted. KNUST, however, has no such affirmative action policy for females. Again, KNUST pioneered the less-endowed schools affirmative action policy which was to be followed later by UG but the mechanics are entirely different. The NCTE's norms for the public universities does make mention of a 5% enrolment quota for students from disadvantaged secondary schools (NCTE, 2012:2), but that is all there is to the affirmative action from the government side; the said document is also silent on affirmative action for females.

6.3.1 Affirmative Action for Females

The affirmative action policy to admit female applicants, particularly in the humanities, a grade-point lower than their male counterparts at UG actually commenced in 1999, and accounted for the enrolment of 1,002 women between 2003 and 2007. Women's enrolment ratio subsequently rose from 25.9% in 1998 to 41.2% in the 2007/08 academic year (UG, 2007: 40).

During my interview with HOP2, he touched on how UG's affirmative action for females is significantly shoring up the number of females in the institution;

...for females also, when the cut-off are say 15, they go a grade below to admit for the humanities; to admit the females because with that policy now, the proportion of female students has gone up quite a bit, it used to be about 20%, 30% but now it's 40 coming to almost 50% which is very good.

So I proceeded to ask about the fairness or otherwise of the policy, especially to the males. He emphasised:

Oh why is not fair? We want to increase the number of females in the population and they all qualify so you need a 100 places and you got 80 males and females and you want 20, and you say the 20 I'm giving to females to make up; that's the rationale. (HOP2)

So obviously, UG's principal rationale for instituting such a policy for female applicants was geared towards achieving gender parity. To be certain, I further asked HOP2 if the initiative is the University's own solution to the problem of low female enrolment in Ghanaian universities. He confirmed:

Yeah that's it! And, but you know some of the problem also comes from lower levels because as they come to senior secondary school, enrolment in science for girls is quite low, and so with the science you can't even get them. In the science they normally tend to go the biological sciences. Medical School for example, some of the best students tend to be female. They go in their own merit; for them they don't have this one point below; it is competed. (ibid)

His comments however bring to mind one of the major weaknesses associated with the implementation of affirmative action policies in HE; which is that the exclusion transcends the borders of HE. The roots of the problem can be found at the lower levels of education, and that it is only the symptoms that are manifest at the HE level (see Weisskopf, 2007; Fraser, 1995).

HOP2 further explained why the UG focuses its affirmative action policy for females on the humanities, alluding to the low enrolment of girls in the sciences at the lower levels as a contributing factor:

Because that's where the largest numbers are and that is where it can make a difference, you know; and like I said in the sciences we don't even have them so it's difficult to give that policy (HOP2).

The report of a panel of experts on the operations of UG had in fact recommended that additional methods be exploited to achieve gender parity; stressing that the policy should be uniformly implemented across the various fields and scrapped once parity of the genders has been achieved:

The University should actively identify additional policies and methods for moving towards gender parity. For instance, qualified female applicants, irrespective of their aggregates, could be offered admission into programmes where women are severely under-represented, such as the sciences, especially the earth, mathematical and physical sciences. When parity is attained, the lower aggregate admissions policy should be terminated. The policy of lower admissions aggregates for women students should be applied uniformly throughout the University.... (UG, 2007: 41)

My interview with the students and graduates surprisingly revealed that majority (from both institutions) of the female participants were not in favour of the affirmative action policy for females. They thought that such a policy reinforces the perceived inferiority of the female gender and also leads to the stigmatisation of same. I asked if the implementation of the policy should continue or females should be allowed to compete with their male counterparts equally for admission slots. While SP13 argues that the policy makes the females feel intimidated in the presence of their male counterparts, SP1 bluntly discourses that it treats the males unfairly:

I think so [competition], because once you start giving concessions to the females because you think they are underrepresented; fine, they are trying to be fair, but then it puts the point there that truly females and males are not the same, do you get my point? But if we know that we are all / let's say if the cut-off point for males is maybe six, for females five, then you go to class like the guys can ask /but because we all know that we all equally got the same results, we all wrote the same exams, we went for the same interview and no concession or whatever was given, you know that, yeah, I'm on the same level with you but if concession is given, even though it will be fair to the general female thing, but doing something else, the girls may be intimidated. (SP13, female, Medicine)

Yes, they should allow everybody to compete at the same time. Let me put it this way, if maybe you are a lady and you want to offer Engineering, do they still give you the opportunity to offer it a lower grade or they will allow you to compete with the guys at the same level? So why should, in humanities, like the grade be cut down in humanities? I think it's not fair to the guys anyway, it's like females are saying that what a guy can do they can also do better so if they can do better, then they should level the ground for everyone to compete, yes! (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

SP1's comment elicited a reaction and a follow-up question from me. Having early on mentioned some of the challenges females encounter with their education, I asked if she did not think that it is fair for such a policy to give females some consideration to compensate them for how some of the challenges they encountered have impacted their academic performance. She offered a rebuttal and indicated that if the root of the problem is dealt with there would be no need for such concessions:

[Chuckles] You know, that's why I'm saying that the whole thing can change from home. If they stop this female, female thing, the ground can be levelled for everyone to compete, yes! So they should stop that female duties and chores from home so that they will give both the guys and girls equal opportunity to study and then when you don't make it as a female you know that you didn't try, not because there was a limitation, yeah. (ibid)

SP3's comments smack of the remediation rationale for affirmative action in HE (see Moses, 2004), but in the same vein, she argues that females have had enough of such concessions so it's about time they are allowed to compete equally with their male counterparts; and that the continuous use of affirmative action is an insult to female intelligence:

I think that it shouldn't continue. Yeah, because if you keep doing that men will keep looking down upon women. They will see us, like, we are not intelligent enough. Even though the University wants to increase... it should be an equal ground. I earlier talked about giving them [females] the chance to first make up for the past years and then come back and then, but I think they've made up enough. At least, we can't just find three women in like one class or something. To an extent, it's quite fair, so I think for now we should start looking at everybody as equal. So if we are saying we are equal then we should fight for the same this thing. (SP3, female, History)

She further objects to the University focusing attention on the humanities, arguing that such a policy would rather make a difference in the sciences. Her view is directly opposed to that of HOP2 who had argued that the affirmative action for females should focus on the humanities:

Yeah, for the humanities I don't think so, but maybe for the sciences that can be continued, but for the humanities there are a lot of women, females in the classrooms, you can see sometimes the females are even more than the males but in the sciences that's not the case. (ibid)

Her comments on intelligence resonate with SP15 who also regards the policy as patronising;

I don't see that as a competition, because if it's with the mind [intelligence] and IQ, I don't think guys have a higher IQ than ladies, so I don't see why you cut us down. Except, of course, they think they [females] shouldn't be in the university and then as way of getting them to the university they do that, but then if it's with the mind I don't think it's worth it. (SP15, female, Nursing)

She was also of the opinion that there should be equal competition for admission between the genders and further rejected concessions for females. She would only approve of

concessionary admission for females if it is based on other factors other than the fact that women are intellectually inferior:

No, I don't think it's necessary if it's based on IQ. If it's based on other, some other reason, then it might be necessary. Like I said, sometimes they think that you will get married so the guy is supposed to work so the guy is supposed to go university. If it's that then they could do that, but if it's with the mind and learning then I don't think it's necessary. (ibid)

The views of SP11 and GP1 are in direct conflict to that of SP3 and SP15. They argue that the males have superior intelligence and so the affirmative action admission policy for females is still warranted as a consequence of that:

Some scientific research prove that guys actually, they pick up faster than girls. Guys actually their brain is more; not that they are better than girls but they tend to pick up. Girls are easily distracted; OK, one of my friends he keeps saying that it's very impossible finding a female surgeon because after like 26, after you get your doctorate degree [medical degree] nothing really pushes you to go on to be a surgeon. But guys, they want to, they just want to study so if you are put on the same, it won't; OK it will be fair but until it gets to a point where we are more like co-equals then they should continue. (SP11, female, Engineering)

So SP11 believes that affirmative action for females is justified because they are easily distracted and does not also see the genders as being equal, stopping short of providing the source of the scientific research she alludes to. When I asked about the fairness of the policy to the male gender she affirmed:

Yes, because we live in a gender-biased society. There is gender inequality and this is one of the ways to even-up; to make the scales even (ibid).

Understandably, like SP3, SP11 also attempts a legitimization of affirmative action by appealing to both the remediation and the social justice logics. She further argues that females are more disposed to dropping out as a result of the distractions they face on campus. Asked as to why the females would drop out she proceeded to give some details to back her claims;

...the girls, because a lot of distractions are around; a lot of things that will distract you from your studies like guys, like dressing, cooking. But me I'm not really bothered about my looks, like I have to fix my nails, I have to fix my hair. Meanwhile, the time I'm sitting in the saloon my friends are having group studies so I can't go and sit in the saloon and fix my hair, do you get me?... My Mum is always fighting with me. When I was coming this semester she said she was changing my wardrobe because of the way they look; they look too boring because I have not been dressing. I'm not bothered but most girls are, so this is what is going to distract them, do you get me? Yes, the girls who are distracted; I have friends [males] who hardly study they always party but they still do well but if you are a girl and you go and follow him you just waste your life, do you get it? (SP11, female, Engineering)

She believes that society expects too much from women and further attributes the distractions facing females to social engineering and construction:

It's normal because of the way society has made us, because if I come to class and I look /a guy comes to class and he hasn't combed his hair nobody is bothered. But if I come to class as a girl, I'm supposed to look neat, I'm supposed to be clean because much is expected of me by the society in that perspective. So if they want to even the scale, then they should treat all of us like guys too... if you like let me go and wear a shoe that is torn; just because I'm a girl someone is going to talk about it. So that is why the girls are more likely to drop out along the line than the guys. (ibid)

As I mentioned earlier, the opinion of GP1 does not differ from that of SP11 on affirmative action for females. She affirms the superiority of male intelligence:

Although we have exceptional ladies, but I think in percentage wise males perform better than females (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate).

To my question “so are you saying the men are more intelligent than the women?” She emphasised: “Men are; per circumstances and all that, men are at advantage”. The reason she offers for the men advantage does not diverge from that of SP11:

I think men per their make-up and all, don't/ even if the person goes and fools about he can still come and settle down and learn; but ladies, after all, you have to come and sit down again. And ladies will be thinking about what happened again till they settle and start learning, you see. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

As a follow-up, I asked if she thought that men are naturally made to excel to which she replied: “I think it can be, it can be” (ibid). Having graduated as the best student in her programme specialisation, I then questioned where she would put herself in her own argument, having regard to the excellent performance she put up. Her answer very much mirrors SP11's argument on distractions females face on campus although the two individuals are from different institutions:

Yes, I think it's about disciplining yourself; and that too most ladies can't do, and how to schedule your time and all, when to do what? (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate).

The results also revealed a dichotomy between the male student-participants who responded to UG's female affirmative action admission policy. SP9 contends that the challenges females encounter in the course of their education merits the adoption of such a policy. He goes beyond the Ghanaian context to examine the issue from a continental African perspective:

I believe it's a good policy and the backdrop is also right because females face all sorts of social, economic challenges when it comes to getting admissions to tertiary institutions. Especially, based on the notion — the African notion — that one day she will get to her husband's house; and that is also a challenge. And other challenges might include using, so to say, the girl-child in the market to help, in the house to help, and any other activities available. And especially in Africa, the female child is deprived of most educational benefits and so northern parts of most African countries, they have children marrying at very early age. (SP9, male, Agriculture)

SP9 does not want female students to compete equally with their male counterparts for admission slots in the universities. I quizzed him about how he would have felt if his admission slot was taken up by a female with a grade-point lower than his; if he would still have seen that to be a fair deal. He still demonstrated his sympathies for the cause of women:

Well, it depends on what our definition of fairness means. If it's a general look of the whole process where female students struggle to get through the SHS, and getting monies to pay for fees would have to come by hawking in the streets, and going through that ordeal to pay for fees and still get that same academic grade to go to university, I think it's fair enough. It [losing admission] wouldn't be much of a problem. (ibid)

SP16 is not the least enthused, however, about the policy, and does not hide his antagonism:

I know this for UG that they have cut-off for females and cut-off for males, but KNUST I don't know something like that. Looking at that thing, let's say we are all students; those days they say 'You are a lady, sit in the house, do some things in the house and let the gentlemen go to school', it has become a (?), but that era is passed. So even now, we have a lot of women who are making more money or living good lives than men so that thing has to be eroded. We all have to compete for the same cut-off point; something like that! Because if you do something like that, it's like they are considering[favouring] the female student, and it's not fair. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

Apparently, neither the remediation nor social justice rationales for affirmative action appeal to SP16, and unlike SP9, he does not see discrimination against girls as an issue in the contemporary Ghanaian society. He does seem to share the opinion of some scholars that affirmative action often results in reverse discrimination and arbitrary favouritism (Fraser, 1995; Weisskopf, 2007; Morley & Lugg, 2009; D'Souza, 1991; Glaser, 1988).

6.3.2 Affirmative Action for Less-Endowed SHS

The disadvantage facing students graduating from the less-endowed SHS in Ghana in their quest to access university education is a fact that has long been established but very little has been done about it at the system level by government to arrest and remedy the situation.

Majority of students who gain admission to public universities come from the few endowed SHS in the country. Majority of candidates from the more than 80% non-endowed SHS fail to gain access to tertiary institutions to read programmes of their choice as a result of their poorer tuition and grades. (NCTE, 2014: 3)

During my interview with HOP3, he revealed that KNUST pioneered the less-endowed SHS affirmative action initiative during the 2003/2004 academic year. HOP2 also did indicate that UG's affirmative action interventions did not come from government:

I'm not aware of any national requirement; only National Council for Tertiary Education [NCTE], they have some norms and for the universities they expect a 50:50 between

male and female enrolment but that's about it! It's only a norm; it's something that people are expected to aspire to but there is nothing that says that if you are not seen to be taking measures something will be done against you or something, but I think most institutions are trying to do that.

I asked GOP3 if indeed the Ghanaian government has a policy on access to HE in Ghana to which he answered in the negative, admitting that the government has no blueprint on access:

We have not put down a consistent policy and say this is the policy; we have something called norms and let me just refer to it [reaches for the document and reads from it]. 'To facilitate equitable access to quality tertiary education'. So this is what the Council hopes to do, to facilitate equitable access.

The 11-page document (*NCTE Norms for Tertiary Education: Universities*) also pegs the target GER for the tertiary sector at 25% but GOP3 disclosed that there is no time frame set to achieve the target of 25% GER. On the issue of affirmative action, I enquired from GOP3 the steps his outfit is taking to support the interventions the HEIs have instituted to deal with the unequal access for the disadvantaged groups. He admitted that practically nothing has been done in that regard, thus confirming HOP2's allegation:

The NCTE has done nothing about it, only that we have established a quota that at least 5% of those enrolled should be; that's all, just a ratio. It's not fine; if it were certain countries there will be performance funding such that those who enrol, the institutions will be rewarded for enrolling but we haven't done anything. (GOP3)

Against this backdrop, I asked HOP3 as to whether or not KNUST has set aside a percentage for the admission of students from the less-endowed schools. He replied in the negative, and also took me through the recruitment process for this category of students:

We don't have percentages. What we do is this; we require each school that has been identified as a less-endowed school. I tell people that you don't ask me how they are determined because we don't determine the school whether it's a less-endowed or not. We wrote to GES and they furnished us with the list of less-endowed schools so we expect those schools to furnish us with the names of six students —three boys and three girls— the best three boys and the best three girls from the school, and then when it comes in we look at it and we place them accordingly...Unfortunately, we don't have percentages that we say that this is the percentage that we hold on to; no, it depends on the background of the students we receive, their performance and then the vacancies that are available.

So what KNUST essentially does is that the six students (three females and three males) who put up the best performance in the WASSCE in their respective schools categorised by the GES as less-endowed are considered for admission in programmes relevant to the subjects they pursued at the upper secondary level. The institution further eases the admission process somewhat for the 'less-endowed students' by waiving the purchasing

of application forms for admission as the case of GP2 discussed earlier exemplifies. HOP3 indeed confirmed that the admission form is not required;

No, no, some of them did not buy any form so they are just there and then they got letters that they have been admitted based on their performance in their schools. Yeah, a few of them might have bought forms on their own and even that sometimes when it so happens; for instance, at a point in time there was this young man who was admitted into one programme, I don't remember what exactly the programme is, but I remember very well when we did less-endowed [admissions] he had been admitted to Electrical Engineering so he came and we converted it for him from his existing programme to Electrical Engineering. (HOP3)

As noted earlier, UG also has in place affirmative action for students from the rural schools but the implementation of the policy is different from that of KNUST which recruits the students directly from the SHS with the cooperation of the school heads. UG selects such students from those who voluntarily purchased its admission form. In terms of the numbers, UG admits a student or two from such a school who applied with their well-endowed counterparts as opposed to the six slots KNUST automatically offers to students who have met the minimum entry qualification and pursued subjects relevant to the programmes on offer. HOP2 admits that UG's policy in its current form requires some refinement:

...Well, I will think the current system, the only thing is that with the less-endowed, I will think that perhaps that should be modified a bit at least as it happens at Legon [UG]. What they do is they pick only one student —the best student from a school— that did not have anybody qualify for university. So if you happen to have just one person qualify in use of her own merit, then nobody else will get in. And then if nobody qualifies then it's just one person who will be given. So that one I think it can be reviewed, maybe reviewed to maybe enable a few more people come in through that means.

Table 6: Admission and Enrolment of Less-Endowed Students at UG, 2010/11-2014/15

Year	Schools	Admitted	Enrolled
2010/11	52	53	40
2011/12	13	14	10
2012/13	28	29	12
2013/14	65	79	50
2014/15	55	82	37
Total	213	257	149

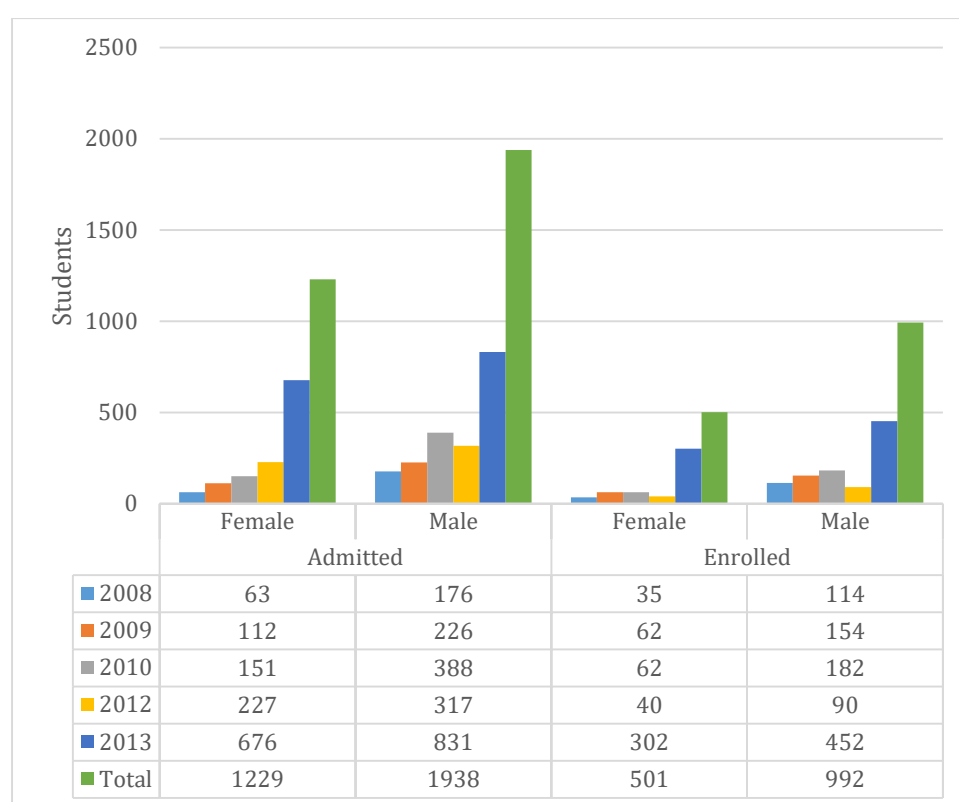
Source: Author's calculations based on UG 2015 data.

Table 6 indeed lends some credence to the argument of HOP2 that the UG has to do more to expand the intake of students from the less-endowed SHS, and the situation at KNUST (see Figure 6) makes that claim rather persuasive. Although, the data from UG are not disaggregated by gender, the evidence suggests that during the period of five years under

review, the highest number of students the institution admitted was 82 compared with the 1,507 from KNUST.

The case of UG should, however, be viewed against the backdrop that it also has affirmative action for females, the beneficiaries of which may not necessarily be from the disadvantaged strata. As regards the programmes this category of students is admitted to, the data from UG further indicate that 208 (81%) out of the 213 students were admitted during the period under review to pursue the Bachelor of Arts Degree with 13 (5%) of such students admitted to the Bachelor of Science in Administration, one of the highly selective programmes at UG. Representation in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields was the lowest among the students admitted from the less-endowed SHS. Students were admitted for the first time into Diagnostic Radiography, Physiotherapy, Medical Laboratory Science and Veterinary Medicine for the first time in the 2014/2015 academic year. With the exception of Medical Laboratory which had three students who even failed to enrol, the rest had just a single representation. The low admissions in the STEM fields is not surprising, having regard to the non-existent and under-resourced science laboratories in such schools. The majority of the less-endowed SHS do not even offer programmes in General Science, owing to the fact they do not have the teachers and the infrastructure to do so. The data from KNUST is not disaggregated by disciplinary tracks for the less-endowed students.

Figure 6: Admission and Enrolment of Less-Endowed Students at KNUST by Gender, 2008-2013



Source: Author's construct based on KNUST 2014 data.

As Figure 6 shows, the number of students admitted from the less-endowed SHS has seen a steady rise for the most recent five-year period for which data are available, peaking at 1,507 in the 2013/2014 academic year. Of the 3,167 total admissions offered during the said period, though, the share of females constituted 38.8% which is almost half of the 61.2% for the male category. The data also indicate that in 2008/09, the students were admitted from 114 of such schools with the intake doubling and peaking in 2012/13 to 228, and dipping slightly to 221 schools in the 2013/14 academic year.

According to HOP3, there has been a steady increase in the number of less-endowed students admitted and the most recent one in particular is attributable to a change in the *modus operandi*:

Yes, there has been an increase, constant increase in the numbers as from the past we take (?), and it has to do with the way we handle it. For instance, at a point in time, before I came here, what we normally will do is that we write to the schools for the schools to furnish us with the list of the students. And incidentally, you know the normal attitude; some of them, one, will not submit it at all or others will come very late. So I started working round the clock and fortunately for me last year, I was able to obtain the results of such students. In fact, that is what made the number go up to 1,500 last year. I was able to get the results directly from WAEC, so we did not wait for the students that they will apply or the school will send it to us. WAEC gave us the results direct from WAEC and we used that one to work and that's what improved upon the numbers like that. (HOP3)

So the current approach KNUST has adopted to further ease the process for these students is to obtain their results from the WASSCE directly from the examining body (WAEC) so as to avert some of the bottlenecks accompanying the implementation of the affirmative action policy. HOP3 further submits that it would be difficult for such students to enrol in the University without affirmative action; observing that those admitted perform commendably;

...I must say that majority of them when they come in you realise that they are able to do very well. But if you allow them through the main competition like I'm saying, based on the cut-off and things, some of them wouldn't have got admission in the first place; but because of that they are able to just go [come in].

6.3.3 Performance of Students from the Less-Endowed SHS

Although no consistent and comprehensive studies have been done with regard to the performance of rural students who enter the universities on affirmative action, there is agreement among the stakeholders that such students have indeed acquitted themselves well, despite the disadvantage with which they enrolled in the universities. This is how HOP3 assessed the initiative at KNUST:

It's been great...and I must say that majority of them when they come in you realise that they are able to do very well... (HOP2)

HOP2 also echoed the views of HOP3 as far as the implementation of the intervention at UG is concerned:

Yeah, I don't think a consistent study has been done but I know, two years ago or so I know a girl who was admitted through that process, she graduated with First Class. She was also active in SRC [Student Representative Council] activities; I mean, which means that she has the potential. If it hadn't been for that scheme she probably haven't come in at all, and there are examples like that. I think the University is thinking of doing something like tracer studies to look at what they are doing after graduation and see whether the scheme has made a difference. But in terms of people doing well, they come in and they do like anybody else. Some end up with First Class, some end up with Second Upper and so on. (HOP2)

GP2 rather commends the vice-chancellors of the universities who initiated the intervention, and also believes that the performance of students from the less-endowed schools vindicate them. He notes that given a level-playing field, they can equally compete with their counterparts from the elite schools:

...It's been something that I particularly have been happy about and, I think I congratulate the vice-chancellors who did so. But the good news is that it has proven that even those who didn't get the best of aggregate compared to their counterparts, getting into the university they equally perform well; and they were not left behind, they were not left out. It's just that I say, kept on saying they didn't have the right calibre of teachers, they didn't have the right calibre of, kind of, infrastructure that would have given them upper edge to be able to compete favourably with their friends. (GP2)

The instance of SP10, a beneficiary of the scheme whose performance in the first year enabled him to change the BA History he was assigned to BA Economics in the second year of the programme, further attests to that fact. This is how GP1 also recounts her chain of successes throughout the four-year degree programme, as well as the performance of other students from the same background:

I had First Class 74.04, and I was the best student in my specialisation; and then the whole class of 115 I was the second highest...I think the first semester exams, we wrote and when it came out, I realised that I was far better than most of them [from elite schools]. It was a strong Upper so I continued and then the second semester, I increased a little to, I think it was 69 point something. Then second year first semester, it shot up to 73 or so from there. Then I had a guy in my class who also came from less-endowed, he also completed with First Class and was a TA [Teaching Assistant] too. So I think mostly/ and then I had another guy too who came from the same school, he completed just this year in Economics and was the best student in the class. So just a few come but when they come too they make the mark. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

GP1 has completed her national service in her department as a Teaching Assistant—a position reserved for exceptional and high performing students—and is currently pursuing a master's degree in the same university. GP2 who was also admitted on affirmative action had a performance similar to that of GP1:

I had a First Class, and I was the best student in my class— that's the graduating class 2014....When I came in the first year I was in Second Class Upper but even though there

was no money, I said 'still I have to continue', so I didn't drop. I was always increasing [the grade-point] to the end. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

Like GP1, GP2 is currently a Teaching Assistant in his department and has plans to enrol in a master's programme upon completion of the compulsory one-year national service.

6.3.4 Constraints

Despite the obvious successes the scheme has chalked, the study also found that it is saddled with a number of challenges. As both Table 6 and Figure 6 indicate, a high number of students offered admissions under the scheme are unable to avail themselves of the opportunity to pursue university education. At KNUST, only 47% of students admitted during the period 2007/08-2013/14 academic year was able to enrol which comprises 41% females and 51% males. The 2011/12 academic year was the lowest enrolment year with 18% females and 28% males. The 2007/08 academic year recorded the highest female enrolment of 56%. The male category had its highest in 2008/09 with an enrolment of 68%. The overall enrolment rate at UG was 58% for the five-year period with the highest of 63% recorded in the 2013/14 academic year. Although the overall enrolment in UG appears to be higher in percentage terms, doing a headcount pales the figures from UG into insignificance when compared with that of KNUST as Table 6 and Figure 6 show.

Although it is extremely difficult to determine why a student will not take up an offer of admission, there are still a number of pointers to explain the problem of low enrolment. The issue, may partly be attributable to aspirational, motivational and informational gap. As the case of KNUST typifies, a good number of such students may not have even conceived the idea of pursuing university education, neither would their institutions make them aware of such an intervention from KNUST. KNUST then springs a surprise on them with admission letters, further requesting that they pay the fees upfront within a limited time or they lose the admission. The case of GP2 amply validates this argument:

Actually, where I'm coming from is less-endowed so when I completed SHS, I bought polytechnic, that's C[Cape Coast]-Poly so I had the admission. So one week I was going to pay my fees and I had a call from the school [former SHS] that I have received some letter so I should go there for the letter, and when I went there it was KNUST; that they are helping some less-endowed schools so I have been admitted there so I have to come for the letter, and one-week time I have to pay the fees. If I don't pay the fees within one-week time, the scholarship [admission] they will take it away.

So GP2 who had never planned to go to the university suddenly got an offer 'out of the blue' and had just one week to pay the fees up or risked a forfeiture of the offer. This may, in fact, be the story of a host of others who may even want to accept the pleasant surprise, but may be held back for obvious reasons.

Allied to this possible cause, is the issue that the less-endowed admissions do not come with scholarships and any other financial aid as the government has not earmarked any

funding to support the initiative. The majority of this category of students also come from the rural areas where poverty is rife. Some of these students do not even have money to purchase admission forms as was the case of GP2 and SP2. HOP3 alluded to the funding conundrum adding that KNUST had decided to allocate 30 MasterCard Foundation scholarships it had secured for needy but brilliant students to those admitted through the less-endowed admission initiative;

...I must say that as we speak to you now, the University has won some form of scholarship for students with that background [less-endowed]—MasterCard Foundation scholarship. And in fact it is for brilliant but needy students but when it came in we realised that it will be a very good thing for people from that background, so they are the first batch of people we have who are benefitting this year.... The issue is that even the MasterCard Foundation I'm talking about; this is the first year they are starting; they can give scholarships to a maximum of about 30 students. (HOP3)

So with the 1,507 admissions offered, the funding can only cover up to a maximum of 30 students. The University also gave those who were offered admission in 2013/2014 but could not take up the offer the opportunity to enrol in 2014/15, since the institution did not admit candidates who wrote the WASSCE in 2014 due to the fact that their results were not released in a good time:

...You realise that this year we did not wait for people who are writing exams this year; 2014 results. We are not taking them, they will wait and come to school next year. But we realised last year those we admitted [less-endowed] were unable to come, some of them were unable to come so we gave them the option that if you are still available you can come to school, so the majority of them are coming in this year. (ibid)

At UG HOP2 also indicated the UG does not receive any funding from the central government in support of its affirmative action initiatives. GOP3 indeed confirmed that universities do not receive funding for those interventions:

...With the funding policies of government now, I mean, it's really difficult to get funds to do some of these things... it's a real, tough issue because all those things need to be funded somehow by some means and if it's not through student fees, if it's not through government support then I don't know; one can only rely on donations and things, and our environment hasn't caught up with donations for such purposes. (HOP2)

There is nothing. Let me tell you our funding is not linked to policy; our funding is what do we call it? line-item. The institutions bring their things in line-items and then we try to meet it. That's all! (GOP3)

HOP2 also argued that access alone is not enough for this group of students and that more needs to be done to ensure equity, their survival and success:

I presume that for access to be effective you also have to make sure that once the person is admitted it is possible for the person to progress.... So apart from a system that ensures entry, one has to also have a system that allows such people to operate within the system to be given equal opportunity to do well. (ibid)

At the micro level, SP10 from a very poor family and one of the poorest regions in Ghana, shared with me his financial struggles. To my question, at what point he felt the negative impact of the financial situation the most, he replied:

That was when I had the admission to the university here. It was seriously difficult but the way I was performing, my head of institution [former SHS] saw that I was someone in future who can help the economy so he thought it wise; he contributed his quota to my financial this thing. I was also putting something down [saving] small, because I know that definitely what I have done will yield good results. So I was also putting down something small, you know from that place [Upper West] to this place, the cost of living is very high and the school fees was also high, accommodation was all over, despite they had the (?) it was still difficult for me. Then I came to the school; school [university] authorities I informed them about some of the challenges. (SP10, male, Economics)

I then asked if his correspondence with the university authorities on his financial situation had yielded any positive results, to which he added:

Not really. It's this year that we applied for some kind of this thing [funding] but I was told that those of us who were able to come, it means we are not part. Like, they gave some scholarships for less-endowed schools, we all applied for it but we were told it's for those who are still in the house who were not able to come; have you seen? (ibid)

Apparently, SP10 was hoping to secure one of the 30 MasterCard Foundation scholarships HOP3 made reference to, but as a second-year student he could not qualify since the facility, according to HOP3, had been reserved for the new entrants. His case reflects HOP2's comment that access alone is not enough for this category of students. This is how SP10 received the news that he could not be considered for the scholarship:

The news I had I was sad because I was putting my hope on it, knowing very well that I will be considered. So when the interview time came and I didn't get any call, I had to find out myself. I called and found out, they told/ my faculty they supported me with some GHC 100 [US\$ 30] just to cater for part of my school fees this academic year, and the other SRC I'm still hearing that the provisional list is out, of which I have gone through and my name wasn't there, and they are saying that the final list will be out by the close of this week which I'm still hoping to see whether my name will be part. (SP10, male, Economics)

So it appears the prospect of also securing funding from the SRC is equally bleak. At the time of the interview, SP10's institution had just opened for the 2014/2015 academic year and he had still not paid his fees which should be done before the student is registered for the academic year, otherwise the individual loses their studentship unless the institution decides to tinker justice with mercy and allow some part payment. For the 2014/2015 academic year, SP10 is required to pay an academic facility user fee (AFUF) amounting to GHC 695.43 (US\$196) and if he resides in the University's own residential facility, an additional payment of GHC 580.00 (US\$163)⁶⁹ upfront is required or even

⁶⁹ <https://www.knust.edu.gh/admissions/fees/ug-fees-continuing> 10 March, 2015

higher, in the case of private accommodation. Having secured only a support of GHC 100, he faces an uphill task paying the fees in addition to other indirect expenses such as food, clothing and books. This is a student who is excelling and by virtue of that has been able to change the programme assigned to him, to one of choice but who risks dropping out for financial reasons if not resilient.

Although GP2 has graduated, his case was no different from that of SP10. He recounts the deprivation he suffered during his studies:

...I was in one of the halls here so I have to go the house every weekend to collect money. At times you can't go, when you call the house there is no money so you have to stay in your room without food. So I was feeling it but in all I said 'No, I have to learn'. Even if you are learning you feel that you are hungry but you don't have the money. So I felt the impact more in the university than all the other institutions. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

The financial difficulties those from the less-endowed category grapple with is not entirely a male affair, GP1 also did not hide her financial plight while studying for the first degree:

...University too was challenging...it got to a point that, like, let me just force myself [laughs]. With just four cedis [US\$1.2] on me, it's challenging and like calling home, you know Daddy is not working and all, and they too they are even struggling to eat and all. So at times I just/ but always I had food on me. For that one 'deɛ' my Mummy always does well. Like when I'm coming to school, I get a lot of food so I cook always, and I think that helped but with money, I wasn't always getting money. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

Apart from the financial constraints impacting the implementation of the affirmative action for less-endowed SHS, HOP3 also mentioned the uncooperative attitude of some of the heads of the SHS as a challenge the University is battling with, detailing the steps that are being taken to remedy the situation:

Well, the less-endowed the major constraint was what I was saying that, one, you write to them [school heads] for them to furnish you with the names, it will delay; some of them will delay some of them will never come. Two, when we admit them, you see like I'm saying, here am I sitting down here there is somebody coming from [name withheld] secondary school, I go to WAEC to get the person's result, I don't know the person. So when we admit them, we don't post the letters to them because we don't want impersonation. So what we say is that the heads of the schools should come and pick the letters for them. You will be amazed that some of them will not come and pick it, some of them will put impediments on the way of the students. They ask the students to give them money to go and collect it. In fact, that is even what made me even go for the results from WAEC. Some of them they ask the students to pay them before they will submit the names to us; they are some of the impediments we have when it comes to this. (HOP3)

GP1 recalls feeling intimidated being in the company of students who attended the elite SHS as one of the experiences she had settling in on campus;

...I came from a less-endowed school so when I came I met people from Holy Child, Prempeh, Wesley Girls and all that in my school [department]. Then we started with academic work. At times it becomes intimidating meeting this people, because first impression, if you don't take care you wouldn't talk in class... (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

Her comments prompted me to ask if she ever felt inferior being in the company of students from the elite schools. She replied:

Oh yes, for like two months I was really thinking about it whether I was the one on this campus or not. At times it becomes somehow, because before the lecturer starts talking people are already making contribution and all that...So you will be there in class and people will be making contribution here and there and you will be there, but I think at end of it all too, God showed himself great [laughs]. (ibid)

After my interview with SP10, he alleged in the post-interview conversation, off-record that he is facing some stigmatisation from some students and academic staff. According to him some lecturers will go to class and ask all the students admitted on the less-endowed initiative to stand up, and he felt bad on such occasions.

Both SP10 and GP2 who have had the opportunity to access HE because of the affirmative action for less-endowed, make recommendations ranging from fine-tuning the implementation of the initiative, to a more transformative solution to the phenomenon of social stratification in Ghana's HE:

To me, I will recommend that the government and the institution in charge of social issues should really do their homework well to make sure that they serve those who are able to make it. They should be able to; they should try as much as they can to reach the rural areas, to wherever human expectations are needed so that they can bring out some of the challenges they are going through. (SP10, male, Economics)

As we already said, the universities should increase the quota for the admission of less-endowed schools into the tertiary institutions. Another recommendation is that the government must focus more on the less-endowed schools, improve the facilities level and maybe give some motivation to the teachers in the rural areas who are teaching the students. That will also help the students to compete on the same basis with those in the higher [schools?]. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

In essence, the findings from this study on affirmative action confirm the notion that admirable as the policy is, it fails to tackle the problem of exclusion in HE from its roots. Transformative remedies are therefore required to deal with the problem (see Fraser, 1995; Darity et al., 2011, Weisskopf, 2007; Moses, 2010). As the case of the affirmative action for females illustrates, it creates unfair processes and reverse discrimination (World Bank, 2006; D'Souza, 1991; Glaser, 1988) in addition to stigmatisation and other attendant problems (Crosby et al., 2006; Fraser, 1995). The evidence from the study

further point to the fact a comprehensive and multi-sectorial approach is required to deal with the greater social inequality in society, the symptoms of which are manifest at the HE level.

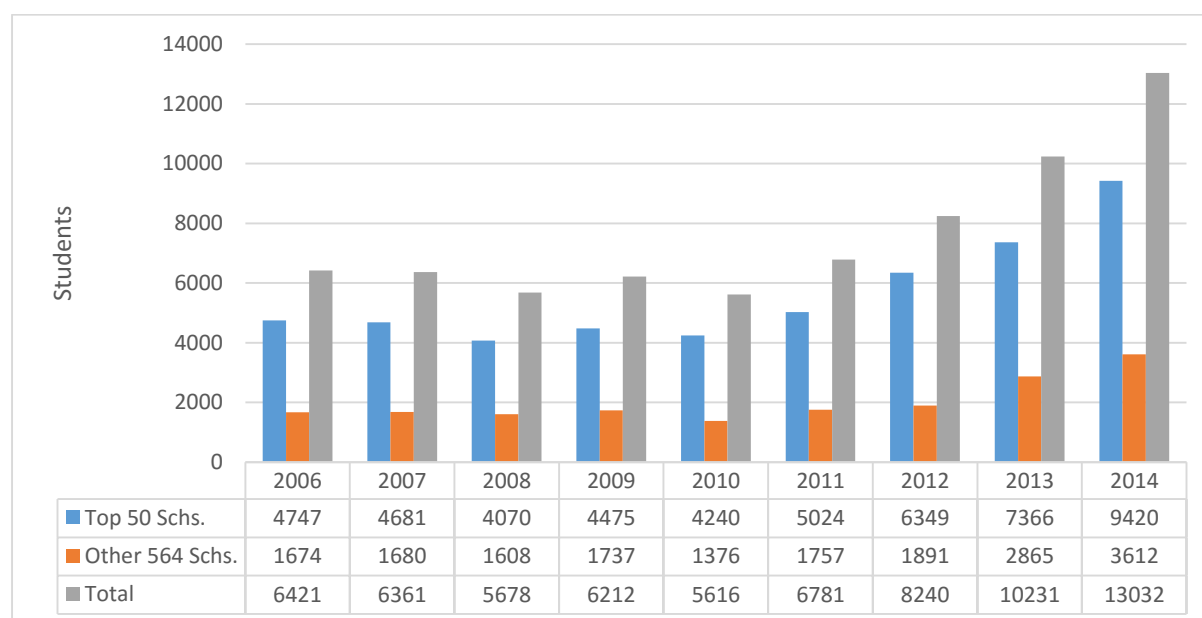
6.4 Distributive Justice

Under this theme, the participants responded to two questions: Whether or not they support setting aside admission quotas for groups that are under-represented in the universities such as students from the less-endowed upper secondary schools and those from the northern regions of Ghana. The second question also sought the views of participants on treating the upper secondary schools in Ghana differently (using different admission criteria) with respect to university admissions, by virtue of the resource gap between the elite schools and the less-endowed ones.

6.4.1 Uneven Distribution of Opportunities

The distribution of HE opportunities in Ghana is highly skewed towards students coming from the minority elite schools; and as noted elsewhere in this chapter, more than 80% of students who attended the less-endowed schools fail to gain admission to any tertiary institution in Ghana, primarily because the grades from the school-leaving exams are not ‘good enough’ due to high cut-off points for admissions according to the NCTE (NCTE, 2014). The data from KNUST and UG confirm the persistence of the unequal distribution of HE places.

Figure 7a: Undergraduate Admissions at UG by SHS Background, 2006-2014



Note: Analysis excludes 13 WAEC private exam centres. The Top 50 schools represent schools with the highest representations for each admission year.

Source: Author's calculations and construct based on UG 2015 data.

Figure 7a shows the previous upper secondary schools of students admitted to the UG during the nine-year period for which data are available. The total admissions based on the schools declared by applicants stood at 68,572 from 2006-2014. Of the 614 schools represented, 73.5% (50,372) of admission places was taken up by students from only 50 schools, leaving a share of only 26.5% (18,200) for the majority 564 remaining public and private schools. The lowest share of the Top 50 schools was 71.7% in 2008 with 2012 emerging as the highest, with a share of 77.1% of total admissions. A closer look at the data also reveals that while schools like Presbyterian Boys' SHS, Legon-Accra, Wesley Girls' SHS, Cape Coast and Achimota SHS, Accra had 565, 506, 386 respectively, of their past students admitted to UG in 2014, a total of 202 schools had no single representation in the University. The average admission for the Top 50 category was approximately 188 in 2014. The phenomenon of 'no-school-representation' peaked in 2012 with 294 schools. As seen from Table 7a, for almost a decade nearly a third of UG's undergraduate admissions has been taken up by only ten schools constituting just 1.63% of the 614 schools. The implication is that for every three students admitted during the period under review, one of them attended one of the ten secondary schools which are all categorised as Option 3 (formerly Category A) SHS.

Table 7a: Share of Undergraduate Admissions for Top 10 Secondary Schools at UG, 2006-2014

Senior High School (SHS)	Share of Total Admissions	%Total Adm.
Presby Boys' SHS, Legon-Accra	2,908	4.24
Wesley Girls' SHS, Cape Coast	2,715	3.96
Achimota SHS, Accra	2,323	3.39
Aburi Girls' SHS, Aburi	2,103	3.07
Mfantsipim SHS, Cape Coast	1,784	2.60
Prempeh College, Kumasi	1,714	2.49
Pope John's SHS, Koforidua	1,701	2.48
Opoku Ware SHS, Kumasi	1,608	2.35
St. Augustine's College, Cape Coast	1,592	2.32
St. Roses Senior High School	1,561	2.28
Total	20,009	29.18

Source: *ibid.*

The data also indicate that 67 schools had just a single student admitted to UG during the nine-year period, which contrasts sharply with the case of Presby Boys' SHS, for instance, sending 2,908 students during the same period.

Again, looking at Tables 7a & 7b it is evident that with the exception of Yaa Asantewaa and St. Louis SHS which ranked among the Top 10 on the KNUST list but could not be found on the UG's list, the same schools are represented in both universities. With UG and KNUST being Ghana's largest and most prominent HEIs, this situation should be a matter of concern. The two SHS are all located in Kumasi where KNUST is also sited, which gives one a sense that as far as this study goes, proximity is also important to students when choosing HEIs. The positions of Opoku Ware, Prempeh College, and Presby Boys on both Tables (7a & 7b) strengthen this argument.

Table 7b: Share of Undergraduate Admissions for Top 10 Secondary Schools at KNUST, 2009-2014

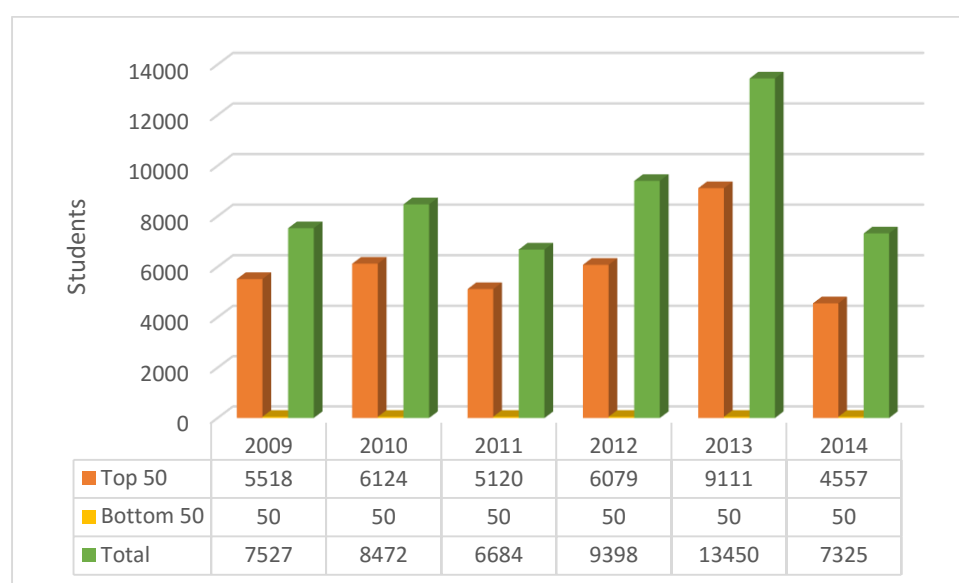
Senior High School (SHS)	Share of Total Admissions	%Total Adm.
Opoku Ware SHS, Kumasi	1,842	3.50
Prempeh College, Kumasi	1,646	3.11
Wesley Girls' SHS, Cape Coast	1,621	3.10
Presby Boys' SHS, Legon-Accra	1,456	2.80
Mfantsipim SHS, Cape Coast	1,273	2.41
Yaa Asantewaa Girls' SHS, Kumasi	1,223	2.31
St. Augustine's SHS, Cape Coast	1,207	2.30
St. Louis SHS, Kumasi	1,097	2.10
Pope John's SHS, Koforidua	1,036	2.00
Achimota SHS, Accra	1,002	1.90
Total	13,403	25.53

Source: Author's calculations based on KNUST 2014 data.

Figure 7b further indicates that the distribution of opportunities at KNUST follows the same pattern as that of UG. Although the data on schools with no students gaining admission are not available, it could be seen that the distribution has equally been disproportionate. 50 SHS in Ghana took 36,509 (69.1%) admission places out of a total of 52,856 admissions offered from 2009-2014. The share of these 50 elite schools was as its highest (76.6%) in 2013 with the lowest (62.2%) registered in 2014. It was mainly due

to the fact that the University did not admit the 2014 WASSCE candidates, which ‘minimised’ the stiff competition for admission for that year. As Table 7b also demonstrates, 10 SHS dominated admissions during the five-year period with a share of approximately a quarter of the total admissions, as was the case at UG. The data show that in 2013 for example, five SHS (Mfantsipim, Opoku Ware, Wesley Girls- Cape Coast, Presby Boys – Legon, Accra) cumulatively had 2,030 (25.7%) out of the 9,111 total admissions for that year; indicating that the five schools alone out of the 411 SHS represented that year had a share of roughly, a quarter of all the admissions.

Figure 7b: Undergraduate Admissions at KNUST by SHS Background, 2009-2014



Source: Author’s calculations and construct based on KNUST 2014 data.

6.4.2 Quota for Under-represented Groups

As expected, all the students and graduates who had their upper secondary education in the less-endowed SHS supported the idea of assigning admission quotas to groups that are under-represented in the HEIs:

Yeah, I agree with that because when I had the opportunity...I was so happy that I was asking myself: ‘Why? Is it about God or who?’ Because I was so shocked that the admission came. So I think they have to have some quota for the less-endowed schools; even if it will be more, the quota should be more in the less-endowed schools because when the less-endowed people come they perform more, better than those in the high, high schools. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

Yeah, it’s good idea. I think it’s a good idea giving concessions to the less-endowed. But personally I have come to know that although the grades might not be good from the SHS, but when they come to the university, most of the time, less-endowed students perform. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

Yeah, it should be allowed that way so that those over there [northern regions] will also get the opportunity to do their best they can. Maybe mostly where they are coming from affects them a lot especially from the family to the school. Over there some of the schools

are really in a deplorable state whereby if you are not someone who can cope with such situation you can't do it, but if someone is able to make the grade, like someone within A1-C6, the person may have almost all of them [subjects] C4, C5 which if you add, it will be the cut-off over here, but he is actually within the normal thing [minimum requirements] they need. So I will suggest that we should consider some of those things.... Really, when I came here, I didn't face most of the challenges that I was facing before because here the environment and everything is conducive which has given me a lot of opportunities to put up my best. (SP10, male, Economics)

GP1 and obviously exhilarated GP2, in effect, argue that the performance of students who have been admitted so far would justify setting aside the quota for the minority groups, while SP10 cites his own case as someone who has transitioned from a poor learning environment to a more conducive one enhancing his academic performance. He falls short, though, of acknowledging the financial challenges he is contending with.

Support for the admission quota was however not only limited to those with the rural background. SP4 would support such a move because he believes education is for all and in this context, a quota would enhance the upward social mobility of folks in the deprived areas, while SP8 assert that such a scheme would be a morale-booster for students from those areas to put up their best. SP8's support however comes with a proviso— that those rural students will meet the minimum entry requirements:

I think it's a good idea because inasmuch as they are supposed to qualify for education, it's [education] supposed to be for everyone. Everybody is supposed to be giving an opportunity. If such opportunity is given to people from say the Northern Region and they become responsible people in the society, it's a way of motivating those in that Region so that they can also make it [succeed in life] or something like that. (SP4, male, Engineering)

Yeah, because mostly government attention is on the capital— Accra, Kumasi, Tamale— meanwhile the rural areas are really going through serious difficulties with their education or their facilities. So, students from such deprived areas, I think there should be quota...Yeah, they should be given the opportunity. Once students know that they have such a reserved admissions, that is this rural area or all rural areas have been given 300 allocation. Once such a policy has been put in place, the students will learn and then it will encourage them to learn but if they are not able to meet the [minimum] requirement, there is nothing to be done about the admission to the university. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

Others were also opposed to the idea of quota-based admissions. While SP15 contends that those from the less-endowed schools cannot make their disadvantage an issue, SP16 in a rather cynical tone, argues that the quota will not solve the problem of the people from the northern regions since the people there are more inclined to taking up the role of herdsmen than the pursuit of HE:

It's a good thing though, but sometimes, the situation is such that you really can't look on yourself as I'm from a less-endowed school so I can't do my best. Because you have to know that when you are coming to the university there is nothing like this person is from a good school or from a bad school. So you knowing that you are from less-

endowed, you have to be sharp and come up. Even though when you are in a good school it helps you, but once you are in less-endowed you shouldn't have that excuse because it wouldn't be accepted anywhere. It's when you are in that category knowing that there is no help coming from anywhere; you have to push up, yes, because other people are from there and they make it. (SP15, female, Nursing)

In Ghana now, we see those in the Northern Region; let's say they are a bit lower compared to let say the Central Region, Greater Accra Region and something like that. In the Northern Region, I know they are not much into education. You see, if we even allow them they won't come; I don't think they will come. If you even say we have this cut-off or accommodation for students from the Northern Region, I don't think something like that they will even push themselves to come, because on campus right now, the Northerners on campus they will be very few; not that they can't make it, they can do it but their living don't push them to do that. Because let's say, you know, the Northerners; a young guy, a freshman you have to be a herdsman take sheep and cattle away something like that, and with the female doing something else. So if we even allow that they won't give up themselves to move into the university; or better still we can build a university, they even have a university over there - University of Developmental Studies and yet still people from Accra move to that place. So I don't think we should do something like that for them. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

6.4.3 Treating Deprived SHS Differently

Participants responded to the question as to whether or not different admission criteria should be put in place for the deprived schools to ensure that students from such schools are adequately represented in the universities. SP1 backs the idea:

Yeah, I think it's very true; it's very, very true. I know that if I had gone to like a very big school or the first-class schools like Wesley Girls, Holy Child and the rest, I would have made it like big time! But because of where I went to, I might get a grade according to the school I went. So I think when it comes to admissions they shouldn't be treated equally, not at all! Not at all! (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

The strong support of SP1 for the notion that admissions should take cognisance of the class of school the applicant attended impelled me to ask how such a policy could be implemented. She reiterates that the same method used for the categorisation of the SHS, as is done by the GES, could be adopted at the HE level:

OK I will suggest that the same way they've grouped the secondary schools into first-class and other classes they should also, like, make the cut-off points like that too so that you pick students according to the class of school they went to, yeah. (ibid)

Other students supporting the differential admission criteria ground their claim on the deprivation and hardships rural students endure in their quest for upper secondary education. Their comments echo two of Rescher's (1966) seven canons of distributive justice— allocating resources according to need, and according to efforts or sacrifices— as well as the arguments of Rawls (1972) that inequalities that are undeserved call for redress, and because inequalities arising as a result of birth or natural endowment are undeserved, they should be compensated for (see Chapter Three).

Actually, this world is not; things cannot just happen like that. If you are in the rural area; rural area most of the time they are less privileged. They don't have the equipment and the facilities for such/ so I think they should be considered, they should be considered. But most of the times that is not the case. Sometimes a whole village will fail a WASSCE or BECE, and the whole students from that school will not enter the university; that's a serious matter! That means their educational facilities is nothing to write home about, so that's serious. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

I believe it's a step in the right direction because a well-endowed student who finds him or herself in a less-endowed school might be sort of less privileged because of the facilities available. I have heard of instances where students conduct Chemistry practicals with bowls instead of beakers. This definitely will affect their results; and trying to mark the same results on the same basis, using the same marking scheme is not fair. Lesser-endowed schools should also be given a different consideration and it has been proved that some students from lesser-endowed schools do better than students from the very top-notch schools in Ghana; and some have been best students in their departments, faculties and colleges respectively. So given the disparities in the situation concerning facilities, both staff and also library materials, laboratories, it's only a step in the right direction for institutions and policy-makers to consider schools who are less-endowed in enrolment at the tertiary level. (SP9, male, Agriculture)

...I can say for the rural areas it's stressing and heart-breaking because most of them don't get resources and at the end of the day, they have to travel with the same people — that's those in the urban area— to write the same paper. And most of them don't have good teachers that means that a lot of stuff on the syllabus has not been taught and then they have to go through it. Most of them don't understand anything and they have to learn it by force and then go and write the same paper that's a general paper for everyone. (SP12, female, Architecture)

I think I agree with them; I agree with them. Those in the less-endowed schools don't have science laboratories but when it gets to the WASSCE exams they have to do the practicals but in the high [elite] schools they have the science laboratories where they do all those practicals even every week. So they get to know everything before they come to write the exams, so they have more advantage than those in the less-endowed schools. So I agree with that opinion that they should take into consideration all these criteria depending on the facilities in the high schools and the less-endowed schools before they can do admissions. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

Others were however not the least moved by the idea of a differential treatment in admissions. While SP15 for example, dismisses the idea on the basis of the sheer numbers seeking admissions, SP14 holds the view that the playing field is already equal for all students irrespective of where they had their upper secondary education because they are all taught by the same qualified teachers. Such an argument is rather difficult to accept because in the Ghanaian context, trained teachers often refuse postings to the rural areas due to the absence of basic social amenities. SP13, and to a large extent, SP6 and SP11 also debate that doing so would amount to reverse discrimination. Their views certainly clash with proponents of egalitarianism of opportunities who believe that ensuring social justice would sometimes necessitate sacrificing certain individual rights for the greater benefit of society (Johari, 2001; Rawls, 1972; Hobhouse, 1922). Their arguments, however, demonstrate the tensions between affirmative action and distributive justice

on one hand and procedural justice and meritocracy on the other, as the following quotations illustrate:

...Sometimes the situation demands that there is no time for such things...even those from the good schools they are more than they can admit so they don't really have time to look into that. That is the situation we are dealing with. (SP15, female, Nursing)

No it's fair [current system] because we do the same thing and we have the same qualified personnel teaching us, so it's fair (SP14, female, Chemical Engineering)

As I'm saying, for a medical student if you don't get a good foundation; as to them giving you the opportunity, fine, but those rare occasions if they give opportunity to someone who didn't get a good foundation, meanwhile someone has got a good foundation and the person is sitting at home, it's not fair. (SP13, female, Medicine)

They can take a measure on that. That is when you get a B in that school they will assume you had an A. But if they do it that way, someone too from a very good school will get a B alright but he struggled to get that B. But someone from the less-endowed school gets a B but he didn't struggle to get that B and you just automatically give him an A which will mean you are cheating the one from the very good school.... There are some people from less-endowed schools who are still performing who had 07 from just that school. So why couldn't you get the 07? It means it's not because of the facilities there you didn't study. (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

Yes, it's being done for the BECE. They have the catchment area, if your school falls within the catchment area the grade that you need to apply to the school is not, you are not put at the same level as someone who is in Accra in a private school, it could be done and it will help too, if only the people will take it serious. But it wouldn't also be fair to those who are studying, even though I am having good conditions and I'm studying, the fact that you also didn't get the chance too doesn't mean that I shouldn't be taken because you didn't get the chance, so it's going to be, it will be somehow like there are two sides to that argument depending on where you stand. (SP11, female, Engineering)

SECTION TWO: SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

The following variables are discussed in this section: SES⁷⁰ (parental education, family income) and other significant factors (gender, geographical location and disability).

6.5 Parental Education

Under this variable, the participants described the educational attainments of their parents as well as the influence (negative or positive) the level of education of their parents had on their own educational aspirations, choices and success. The participants also commented on whether or not their parents had experience and knowledge of university life; and how that knowledge or otherwise, became an advantage or disadvantage in their choices for university education.

⁷⁰ Parental occupation is not discussed as a separate theme, but integrated into the analyses as and when necessary.

6.5.1 Attainments and Influence

Table 8a demonstrates that the fathers of the participants are highly educated than the mothers. While eight of the fathers have had university education, only three of the mothers have done so, with the former also having the highest educational attainments as reported by the participants. Only SP7, SP12 and SP17 reported that both parents have a university degree. On the contrary, the parents of SP10 and GP2 never had a formal education. Table 8b further shows that the educational attainments of the parents as reported by the participants is a microcosm of what pertains in the larger Ghanaian society, where females trail their male counterparts at almost all the levels, and are also more likely to be uneducated than the men. The comparability of the two tables, however, is somewhat difficult and should be done with caution.

Table 8a: Parents' Educational Attainments as Reported by Participants

Educational Level	Mother	Father
PhD	0	2 (SP15, SP17)
Master	1 (SP3)	4 (SP3, SP4, SP7, SP11)
Bachelor	3(SP7, SP12, SP17)	2 (SP12, GP1)
Post-Sec. (Diploma/HND)	1 (SP16)	1 (SP1)
Post-Sec. (Certificate)	2 (SP13, SP15)	1 (SP13)
Secondary /SSS/SHS	3 (SP1, SP11, SP14,)	5(SP2, SP5, SP8, SP14, SP18)
Voc./Tech./Commercial	1 (SP9)	1 (SP9)
Middle School/JSS/JHS	5 (SP4, SP6, SP5, SP8, GP1)	2 (SP6, SP16)
Primary	1 (SP2)	0
Never Attended	3 (SP10, SP18, GP2)	2 (SP10, GP2)
Total	20	20

Source: Interview transcripts.

The responses of the participants to the question as to whether or not the level of parental education influenced their own educational aspirations elicited different responses. Participants with both parents holding a HE qualification reported a positive influence as the comments of SP15, SP7 and SP17 below illustrate. SP17 in particular who indicated that the father holds a PhD reveals that the father has set a bachelor's degree as the minimum for her siblings, while SP15 and SP7 point to a strong parental support and motivation:

Yes, a lot. Because of the higher education background, they are able to cater for me and my siblings. So sometimes when I think about it, I have to learn so that I can enjoy a comfortable life I have started with, and then they are always there to support us

financially and everything, then I can just push up and make it [succeed in life]. (SP15, female, Nursing)

Yes, it has influenced us because my father is someone who really likes to learn and all that; yes, and he's given this educational level that everyone in the family should at least have a university degree [bachelor's]; yes, that's the floor. The floor is a university degree and the ceiling is wherever you can get to. But I think looking at my siblings and all of us we are all / two of my siblings [four children in the family] already have a master's degree. So right now, it looks like master's degree is going to be the next floor; but yeah, their educational background has really influenced us. (SP17, female, Law)

Because, even from my tender [age], when I was five they used to help me with my academic work. You come home you have a homework they will help you out. If there is something you learnt in class you don't understand, they will help you out. So they helped me right from the start, they helped me. And then their advice, because in Ghana here you won't get so many parents willing to bring their children to the university because they may not see it as though important. I'm sure with their educational background, that's somehow contributed to my being here. So I think that/ and they also motivate me; that's an interesting aspect. Because I see them and I say, oh, my Mum has gotten that far so I also have to go higher than her. (SP7, female, Business Administration)

Table 8b: Educational Attainments in Ghana (Six years and older) by Gender, 2010 (%)

Educational Level	Ghana	Female	Male
Postgraduate (Master, PhD etc)	0.3	0.2	0.5
Bachelor	1.8	1.2	2.5
Post-Sec. (Diploma/HND)	2.4	1.7	3.1
Post-Middle/Sec. (Certificate)	1.2	1.1	1.3
Secondary /SSS/SHS	10.2	8.6	11.9
Voc./Tech./Commercial	1.8	1.7	1.9
Middle School/JSS/JHS	29.7	28.3	31.2
Primary	26.6	26.6	26.6
Pre-school (Nursery/Kindergarten)	2.5	2.3	2.8
Never Attended	23.5	28.3	18.3
Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: HND=Higher National Diploma awarded at the polytechnic level after three years of studies.

Source: Adapted from GSS (2013: 125-127) Table 7.7.

Other participants like SP13, SP14, SP5 and SP8 with parents educated up to the upper secondary level, did indicate the same positive influence as their counterparts whose parents were university graduates. What is common among this group of participants is that they indicate that although their parents could not make it to the university they expected and supported them (the children) to do so, and to aspire higher:

My Dad is always saying that education is key. As for that they really make sure that you go to school and then you reach the highest possible level...So when I wrote my exam and I didn't do well, they still paid for me to be a fee-paying student because they know that if you don't get your education right, you will just end up in the street selling and you won't really enjoy life. (SP13, female, Medicine)

...They [parents] want us to surpass them, so they do their best to give us the best, so they are doing all they could so we could reach high in education. (SP14, female, Chemical Engineering)

Yes, it did, because for instance when I was a kid my Mum will always tell us that we have to learn hard so that we don't become like her. She wants us to become big women in the future so we should actually study; and they actually did their best to take us to school. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

Oh yeah, yeah, I had a lot of support from my parents, and even though they hadn't gone that far they knew what it entailed and there was encouragement, directions, as to what to do what not to do and everything. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

Yeah, in some way it affects your aspirations. My Dad in particular because he was not able to continue; he had the desire to continue but he was not able to continue he made sure we went to the best schools and he made sure we had quality education so that we will be able to; our aspirations will be higher than his, we will become better than his. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

The third group of participants were those whose parents have either low educational attainments or did not receive any formal education. They maintained that their parents' education did not in any way affect their own aspirations, choices and success but rather, it served as a morale-booster:

No, it didn't affect me in any way, because always I was looking up to certain points. I was thinking that if they didn't have the opportunity to go school, I have to also move ahead of them, maybe come and do something, maybe help them in terms of maybe educational issues in the family. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

Personally, I love it when you put me to a challenge. Like you tell me you can't do this or you advise me and tell me you can't do it. I will just put myself to the challenge. Their [parents] education, I have gone past them, now I'm in the university now so I can say that they influenced me. (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

I draw inspiration that despite where our parents were coming from, they were able to get to where they are now, and I should be able to do better than what they've achieved so far. (SP9, male, Agriculture)

SP18 whose mother did not receive any formal education admitted a negative influence. His admission of a negative influence is directly opposite that of GP2 for instance, whose mother and father did not receive any formal education:

Sure, yeah their level of education influenced because...due to the education background sometimes I have to do certain research for myself and know where to go because they don't have much idea about what is ahead. So I have to do much research and then know the kind of course which meets the job market before maybe I make a decision. So in fact it affects me. (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

10 of the participants also gave their views on which of the parents significantly influenced their educational aspirations, choices and success. Six of them (SP4, SP9, SP11, SP15, SP5 & SP7) indicated that the influence came from both the mother and the father while SP8 and GP1 attribute it to the father. For SP1 & SP4, their mothers exerted the greatest influence:

Yes, they helped with my homework. My Mum was always in primary school; you would even think she is a teacher there. She is always there because she wants to know how we are progressing... (SP11, female, Engineering)

OK from the paying of school fees, getting extra classes teachers and then even at the primary level, they used to help us with our homework. And then sometimes too we discuss. They ask you what you want to be, say, in future, then they guide you. They give you guidance as to how you can achieve what you want. (SP4, male, Engineering)

OK I remember her telling us that she had always wanted to be a nurse and so one of us should become a nurse for her and that had to be my kid sister. She was always like, you girls have to make us proud; I didn't have opportunities like you do now and she believed in us so much. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

Oh, my Dad was always encouraging me to learn. Me, in Class One I wasn't a good student. I think in a class of 66, I was like 65 or so. He told me that he will buy me a dress (laughter) and that started the whole thing. So Class Two I was second; and so he will be throwing you the challenge that when you get this I will get you this and all that and he was always telling me that I was a good student, so yeah, it helped. So he was happy with my performance. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

The comments of SP11 and SP4 illustrate how educated parents take keen interest in the education of their children to ensure that they have a head start in life in general, and education in particular. Unsurprisingly, students like these as evidenced by this study, had excellent grades at the basic level which guaranteed them easy access to the elite upper secondary schools and then to the university, and to the most sought-after programmes. This advantage often eludes students with uneducated parents like GP1 and SP10 in this study. While educated parents are assisting their children with their homework and getting extra tuition for them, uneducated parents cannot at least help with homework. This scenario jibes with the position of Davis-Kean (2005) that the amount of schooling parents have and how the home environment is structured—as the

interactional home environment of SP4 represents— impact the academic achievement of the children.

6.5.2 Guidance and Counselling

Participants were asked to report on whether or not any of the parents had knowledge and experience about university life before they (participants) applied to the university. Those who answered yes were then asked about the advantages such parental knowledge and experience conferred on them while those whose parents did not have such knowledge and experience were also quizzed if they felt disadvantaged in that regard.

SP3 reports how the university experience and knowledge of her mother was brought to bear at the point when she had to apply to the university:

Mmm, yeah, to an extent yeah. Because I didn't do/ most of my applications were not done by me. And even my courses in KNUST my Mum was the one who chose all of them; but she kind of knew me. I was even in SS [SHS] then and the deadline was approaching, so she had to get the forms, buy them and do all those things; fill the form for me. So she basically did most of the things and because she already had a fair idea, she had been to the university, so it was easier to do something like that. (SP3, female, History)

Her positive response triggered the question if she felt she would have been disadvantaged if she did not have such parental resource at her disposal. She stressed:

Yeah, maybe I wouldn't get someone to advise me on the courses to choose and what job opportunities I can get out of them and all those things. I wouldn't have analysed all those things before choosing; and I might have chosen a course that I would not have loved, so I will be confused and all that. (ibid)

SP7 like SP3 has parents who have all attained degrees from the university. Her response to the question of advantage was in the affirmative just like SP3: “Yes, yes, yes they [it] did”. She then proceeded to substantiate her claim suggesting that the mother recommended group discussions for her which had worked for her (mother) during her days in the university:

My Mum was really into learning, this group discussion thing. You know, she was good at that. She will organise her friends and they will sit down and learn. So I think that approach too influenced, although I'm not a good person when it comes to group learning, but I try as much as possible when I find myself in some group. (SP7, female, Business Administration)

SP15 also recalls the help she had from the parents when the time was ripe for her to apply to the university:

I actually told them and they guided me as to which courses will be OK, depending on the job and all; and I knew about what I actually wanted so I got a little insight about what I'm actually getting into and how it will help in the future, so yes. (SP15, female, Nursing)

As regards the question of advantage, SP15 argues that the knowledge and experience of the parents gave her the latitude to choose any programme she wanted to pursue in the university; indicating that her counterparts who are differently situated, are often compelled to choose study programmes the parents desire:

Actually, it all depends because some people it's like they are being forced to do some programmes; because probably, the father thinks he should look after his business but mine, it wasn't like that. Even though my parents went to the medical school, for what you want; fine, they will help you to.... My Dad told me I should take any course I want, and he is OK if I even take Engineering or something. (ibid)

With both parents currently working in the medical field, and a brother also now in medical school, I asked SP15 if she did not think that her choice of study field was influenced by her family. Her response revealed that the environment in which she grew up rather exerted a strong influence:

I understand. People think it's a family thing, but then where I live we have a lot of doctors around with their wives being nurses and most of them have their children being doctors and nurses. So for me, it's a normal thing and I don't really think it's an influence...probably the fact that we are together with them and they always talk about the hospital and you go there and you see people not really feeling well, I think you have the passion to help them. (SP15, female, Nursing)

For SP4, conversely, beyond getting parental guidance for the choice of programme of study, he was able to get some coaching even on where to reside on campus which will reduce the stress associated with campus life, since he was enrolling in the same university the father had graduated from:

Yeah, to an extent. Because, I remember when I got admission to UG, we had to, you know, select halls [of residence]. Since I have never been to campus, my Dad was able to tell me which one to choose which will be close to all the important facilities on campus. I don't have to maybe shuttle from one place to another. (SP4, male, Engineering)

The study revealed that 11 of the student-participants and one graduate have parents who did not attend a university. For this group of participants, the guidance and counselling in the selection of programmes, among others, came from other immediate family members and distant relatives who are either currently enrolled, or have graduated from a university. Others relied on radio programmes, old students from their former upper secondary schools now enrolled in the universities, and lecturers.

The case of SP5 whose father only attained an upper secondary school qualification in particular shows that although the father did not have experience of life in the university, he demonstrated knowledge of same, which according to SP5, he had gained from interactions with his (father's) siblings who had been to university. The father then used that knowledge to strategically guide the daughter. She gave an instance of that during my interview with her:

[Chuckles] OK, my Dad for instance, he usually talks about the books. So he gave me some strategies I could use. And then about my studies, like when the lecturer is teaching, I can record so that when I go back I will play and go over because certain things are there that, I might miss and not take note of; so then those things helped me. So you play and realise that oh OK, he [lecturer] said this and I didn't get it so when you are learning you know that that thing is there for you. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

She then went on to describe how such coaching has become an invaluable asset and given her an edge. Her comments further underscore the need for proper guidance and counselling, especially for first-generation university students, at the pre-entry stage of the HE experience:

When I came, if not for the knowledge I had before coming, seriously I would have been totally lost. But then when I came, I kind of knew what I was about; what to do, how to go about things, because I had the prior knowledge. So then things were not so difficult or complicated for me, everything was just OK. (ibid).

The case of SP13 is quite similar to that of SP5. Both parents did not attend a university but graduated from teacher colleges. She recalls how both the nuclear and extended family teamed up to give her guidance at the pre-entry stage:

I guess being a teacher gives you exposure to all those stuff; and I'm the last born so I have my sisters as examples and my Mum is one of nine children and the rest of them getting to the latter part went to university and all that; so it's not just them [parents] alone...In fact, they decide where you go, me I don't even know myself. I just said I wanted to do Medicine and didn't say much. (SP13, female, Medicine)

Yes, I did [get guidance] and luckily for me too, my elder brother also completed university so he gave me all the necessary information I needed like the admission process, what do, the info. Like, he brought me to campus, took me to certain places I needed to know. So, yes, it really helped me. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

SP9, SP2, GP2 and SP8 belong to the class of participants with no parents, siblings and relatives holding neither a university nor any other HE qualification. Their comments below indicate that they resorted to peers, teachers, radio talk shows, internet facilities for guidance and counselling, which their counterparts obtained directly from parents, siblings and in the worst case scenario, a distant relative:

Most of the assistance was from my friends, and also I use internet facility a lot so I could gather information from the internet, as to what career opportunities for what programmes in the universities in Ghana and outside Ghana. (SP9, male, Agriculture)

I must say that there are a lot of decisions that I have made on my own because I do listen to radio, and other documentaries that people have spoken. And in fact, I listen to a lot of people who have made it [succeeded] in life. So through that I'm able to take certain decisions. And some of my teachers too, I took inspiration from them and decided to choose the programme I'm offering now. (SP2, male, Political Science)

OK, when I was in the JHS I was most interested in the Agric aspect so I told myself that when I get to SHS I will do Agric. But I think I was just talking to, conversations with my friends; some of them had been to the SHS already, some of them told me that no,

nowadays the situation in our economy has been to the Business aspect so I have to move towards the Business so I decided to do the Business. Then when I got to do this place [university]; as I said, when I got admission to this place I was even confused with the Accountancy and the Economics, but when I came I got some advice from my lecturers and I got to know that maybe even if you do Economics you can get the opportunity to work in the area of Accountancy. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

Actually, when we were in secondary school, our old students came to advise us about, or talk to us about the various programmes that were ran; that were going on in the various universities. So at least we had the knowledge about how campus life was and the programmes they offered. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

For SP14, although the father had given her the leeway to choose and pursue any programme of her wish, and true to his word, had sponsored her to purchase application forms from four Ghanaian universities and two abroad, she was left to her own devices at the application stage with virtually no guidance. So I asked what motivated her to choose the programmes she wanted to pursue during the application process, to which she replied:

I chose the ones I wanted to do and I was good at, from JHS the subjects I liked most; so programme pertaining to that subject (SP14, female, Chemical Engineering).

So she based her choice on her favourite subjects at the basic education level. I then asked SP14 if she had given thoughts to her career plans and the job prospects in relation to the programme she had chosen to pursue. She then added: "I haven't really thought about it". Her comment made me ask again why she had not thought about the prospects of a programme she herself had chosen, to which she emphasised:

Yeah, because I want to do a different thing. I wanted to become a medical doctor so it's now that there is a change I haven't thought about all these things (ibid.)

This is obviously a student (first-year) still struggling to find her feet. Her demeanour at the time of the interview clearly showed that she was not motivated to pursue the programme she has been admitted to, and would need some support and guidance to properly settle in.

From the foregoing, it is evident that as far as this study is concerned students with parental experience and knowledge of university made use of that capital to their advantage. The fact that those who did not have that opportunity looked elsewhere for coaching makes such coaching all the more important even at the HE level. In the Ghanaian context, and as far as this study goes, the key proposition of the LCP to the effect that "with growing maturity, a person will be more able to decide on his or her own and will also be less dependent on parental resources, particularly if higher education is a more less free good..." (Muller et al., 1993:3) is divergent. Again, the reliance of some participants on relatives in cases where the parents lack that educational capital should help us understand that students will not only make use of a particular parental capital, but would seek same from other family members (nuclear and external) if the immediate parents do not have it. The findings also confirm the argument of Pfeffer (2008) that

children from advantaged origins, even at HE level, tap into the content and strategic knowledge the parents had gained from their own education.

The cases of participants with no parental knowledge and experience of university life reflect Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum's (2003) critique of LCP that guidance through the educational maze is not only restricted to the early stages of education of schooling, but also affects the HE level where one's social know-how is crucial for success. In the same vein, Lucas' (2001) thesis to the effect that highly educated parents do not only cheer, but coach their children to make their HE experience an easy one using their own accumulated educational experiences and knowledge, while those from disadvantaged origins can at best only cheer them on, has to a large extent been confirmed by the findings of the study, albeit with some exceptions.

6.6 Family Income/Wealth

Under this theme, the participants described the financial status of their immediate families and were also made to self-rank the status by choosing one of these options: *very poor, poor, average, rich and very rich*. They also responded to the question as to whether or not the financial status of the family has influenced their educational aspirations, choices and success, as well as the point in the educational path at which the negative or positive influence (depending on the response to the initial questions) of the financial situation of the family was felt the most. Finally, the participants also touched on whether or not their academic performance (past or present) has been affected by the financial status of their family.

6.6.1 Financial Status

Table 9a: Self-Reported Financial Status of Participants' Family

Status	Participants
Very Rich	-
Rich	3 (SP4, SP15, SP17)
Average	13 (SP16, SP3, SP11, SP5, SP6, SP7, SP1, SP8, SP13, SP14, SP9, SP10, GP1)
Poor	1 (SP18)
Very Poor	2 (SP2, GP2)

Source: Interview transcripts.

The participants' ranking of the financial status of their families was somewhat subjective, particularly those who chose the 'Average' category. It should be interpreted though as how they perceive and construct the reality. SP10 and GP1 for example, reported having families with average incomes as Table 9a indicates, however, the descriptions they gave about the economic situation of their families hardly fit the average income status:

My parents, they are just peasant farmers. They are trying to cater for the family in terms of food and whatever but in my case for instance, even when I was given admission to come to school my head of institution had to come in to help; and I write to people just to support me. The church I go to, I also speak to them and they do, but sometimes too I will try out all my best but it will turn out to be something else... In terms of income, it's very difficult for them to get money to take care of us. Even they are doing all they can to make sure that we get our daily bread but in terms of income to do any other thing, it's always difficult. (SP10, male, Economics)

...It got to a point that, like, let me just force myself [laughs] with just four cedis [US\$1.2] on me, it's challenging and like calling home, you know Daddy is not working and all, and they too they are even struggling to eat...I wasn't always getting money. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

Obviously, these participants from families struggling to eat might have settled for the average option in defence of their self-esteem and to have a more optimistic outlook towards life. The arbitrariness of the options as indicated in Chapter Five, is attributed to the difficulty in estimating and ascertaining family incomes in Ghana due to the large informal sector and the non-existent data. Those in the formal employment sector are also often unwilling to disclose how much they earn monthly or annually. In fact, the Students' Loan Trust Fund (SLTF), aware of this challenge, does not require applicants for the student loan to report the income of the family on the application form. Rather, they ask for certain indicators like home ownership, livestock, electrical appliances, commercial vehicles and shares. It is therefore extremely difficult for even university students to report accurately the income of the parents or family, which informed the decision not only to let the participants choose from the options, but also describe the status of the family.

The comment of GP2 aptly illustrates the situation of those working in the small, unregulated informal sector:

That one 'des' [financial status], it's not good at all. It's very bad because as I said my Mum is a [petty] trader selling kenkey⁷¹, and my father too is a farmer. So the little that they get from the farm and the trading, that is what they use to support me. So, the income status is very bad; you don't have something like savings somewhere that we can; we pull it everyday. Just like the small, small thing that comes that we use to support ourselves. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

6.6.2 Educational Aspirations, Choices and Success

As Table 9b indicates, 17 of the participants indicated that the financial position of their families had an influence. Eight reported that it positively influenced their educational aspirations, choices and success while the majority thought that the financial situation has done some harm to their education. All those who reported their family as rich and a few from the average category belonged to the former group while the very poor, poor and a few from the average group identified with the latter.

⁷¹ A staple dish made from ground corn eaten in most parts of Ghana and other African countries.

Table 9b: Financial Status of Family versus Participants' Education

Influence	Participants
Positive	8 (SP3, SP7, SP11, SP13, SP14, SP4, SP15, SP17)
Negative	9 (SP16, SP5, SP1, SP8, SP10, SP18 GP1, SP2, GP2)
Neutral	2 (SP6, SP9)

Source: Interview transcripts.

Participants reporting a positive influence of the financial status of their families on their own educational aspirations, choices and success share some common characteristics; they attended the elite schools, and are currently enrolled in the most competitive programmes in their respective universities. As the comments of SP15 below suggest and that of SP13 (from the same SHS) elsewhere confirm, these students believe the secondary school they attended gave them more than academic knowledge; what SP13 calls “holistic education” which according to her, gives them a “good foundation” and it is in such schools they meet other students of their ilk:

It actually helped a lot because you attend good school and then you get influenced a lot by friends who are also from good families. So it actually has a lot of positive impact. And then being in a family recognised, proud, it's good; because me and my siblings together because we are from these schools, we are able to co-operate and everything and it gives you a very good insight into so many things. (SP15, female, Nursing)

Yes, it did...in my secondary school we had to pay; our fees as compared to most schools at secondary level; we were paying quite a large amount. I think it helped; although we are not rich, we are average but it helped to finance my education. Even at this level most things we need it's really expensive; even just surviving alone. (SP7, female, Business Administration)

It did, it did. Because if they were a poor family, after SHS, I probably wouldn't be here; maybe to find something to do or maybe waiting to get money before I come, but as time goes on you lose interest in school...but if there is enough resources to get you to the school, you can make it, you can go because my big sister had a friend, she had medical school then, but her Dad said he wasn't going to pay her fees so she didn't come to the university. Although she had the grades, she was good, she wanted to, but no one is going to pay so after sometime you lose interest in it and after sometime you find something else to do with your life. (SP11, female, Engineering)

Another participant ranking the family's financial status as rich, confirms this situation as a virtuous cycle for the rich and a vicious one for the poor;

...it looks like the people who are well-to-do will always choose the good schools and then leave the bad schools for the [poor]... because looking at the rich schools it's the students who leave and come back to help the school get good facilities and other things. But if it's just like the poor people are always going to the poor schools, they are always going to be poor unless they are always going to rely on the government for funds and everything. (SP17, female, Law)

This is one of the points where Lucas' (2009) EMI thesis becomes significant for this study. As noted earlier, the EMI, in part argues that universalising a particular transition (in this case the upper secondary), will not necessarily lead to a reduction in inequality because "advantaged actors will discover or elaborate qualitative differences within the universalized transition and secure access to better quality. And, if better quality confers advantage, then qualitative differences will effectively maintain inequality" (p.500). The views of other scholars like (Berg, 2010; Greenstone et al., 2003; Sewell, 1970; McKnight, 2015) on this phenomenon as discussed in the literature review also hold true. With the quantitative differences at the upper secondary school level in Ghana diminishing, parents are increasingly concerned about quality and about schools that will assure their children admissions to the most competitive programmes of study in the universities where the battle is fought and won by those with the best of grades from the upper secondary matriculation exams⁷². Again, the findings from this study, to a significant extent confirms postulate three of the EMI which contests that "if qualitative differences are common the socioeconomically advantaged will obtain qualitative advantage" (Lucas, 2009: 484). SP4's comments below give some force to the argument:

Yes, it did, because even though they try to give us the best of education that their might could. We as kids we saw that they saw other schools that we thought would have been nice to be there too, but due to the exorbitant school fees were not able to attend such schools. So to an extent, the economic status of your parents affects your educational aspirations. (SP4, male, Engineering)

On the contrary, SP1 and SP18 relate how the financial status of their families negatively impacted their educational aspirations, with the latter making reference to how the situation made the brother settle for a low-tier tertiary education although he was qualified to pursue a degree programme, and the struggles he himself has had for the same reason. SP8 is reconsidering a change in his university major for financial reasons:

Yes, I think it does or it did. Because for instance, I had always wanted to be a lawyer and I told you applied to two universities, I chose Economics at UCC and then Law here but I didn't get it because of the grade limitation. Let's say if my Dad had money, he could have afforded the fee-paying thing [option] and I would have been able to do the Law, but because there is no money I just have to take what the university gave me, and then maybe in future I will still do what I want to do. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

For that one sure. Let me use my brother for instance; before he entered the [teacher] training college he had to choose that aspect because during that time they were getting some allowances so he could get that one to support his education. He could have pursued a degree but due to the financial status, he had to drop and look at other things, other places. So in fact, it affects our education and sometimes it may be getting closer to examination and you haven't paid your fees so it will create certain mental and other stuff; a whole lot! Time for studies, the book may be before you but you don't have even the concentration to focus. So sure it affects us, it affects me for instance. (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

⁷² See the comments of GOP2 under the 'Influence of Previous Educational Background' for example.

It has affected me because now that my Dad is not around [deceased]; at first he has been doing everything but now; I wanted, I had wanted to major in Economics but because of this financial problem and the fact that I will not be getting food and things that will keep me going, I will not get them regularly, so I decided to minor in the Economics then major in the Information Studies, because in the long-run it will not help me. I will end up putting myself under unnecessary pressure, so it has affected my aspirations. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

Well, sometimes when things go wrong, it really turns towards the negative side, it really affects you as a student. Average [income] can go up or low so if it tilts towards the negative direction, it really affects you as student; seriously it affects you. Your focus is kind of shifted, because you are disturbed, worried. What else, 'where am I going to get this from, will I be able to get this?' So it causes some distractions. So then, seriously, personally, it has affected me negatively because sometimes I'm really supposed to focus and do what I'm doing but then you get the pressures from here from there and then it's actually draws you back, you know. So academically, I wouldn't say it has really helped... (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

The stories of SP1, SP18, SP8 and SP5 reflect the view of Berg (2010) to the effect that students from poor backgrounds tend to have adjustment issues in the university, and that the lack of affluence also tend to exert an influence on their self-image and career ambitions even at an early age. The case of GP2 gives further impetus and credence to the argument of Berg (2010):

At times, for instance when I was at the JHS, it got to registration time when I had to register, go and write the BECE and there was no money. So I think even the time for the registration even passed; one week later then I went to pay. So at times when I'm in the house when I'm sitting and my mind gets to those things I become so confused because my aim is to go ahead, move further in education so if my parents are lacking something to pay my fees or do the registration, I become so sad. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

For GP1 in particular, the financial status of the parents cost her a dream well-endowed school. Although she duly qualified, the parents had to manage her expectations by enrolling her in less-endowed SHS in their hometown:

Yes, for example my SHS I never chose [the less-endowed school attended]. I never chose [the school], but it happened that they [parents] didn't have money so they told me to come [go] like that. So I came to [the school] not from a free or a willing heart, yes; because of some situation that made me opt for [the school]. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

This is how she felt about the decision of the parents and the eventual choice of the school she never liked:

Oh I cried aah! It was one friend, she went to Mfantsiman [her dream school]; she and her sister, they told me that I shouldn't worry about it, they believe I can still make it there [the less-endowed school]. So they encouraged me and then I started but I never liked the school; seriously, I never liked the school and the students in the school. (ibid)

It was only SP6 and SP9 who argued that the financial status of their families has had no impact on their educational aspirations, choices and success although SP9 would later make reference to an instance where money issues impacted his success in the upper secondary school-leaving exams:

It hasn't; because, I actually don't look at those sides when I'm doing something. I said I like competition so at school it was just competition. If you had 'A' in this one, you will drop and I will get the 'A' and I will tell you know, I'm still getting that 'A', continuing. So in that way, that was how I was able to do something, not because of any other factor. (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

6.6.3 Educational Level and Financial Status of the Family

Under this indicator of the education–family income interconnection, participants reported the point (level) in their educational path at which the financial status of their families (as reported by the participants) was felt the most. Table 9c confirms the majority of participants reporting the HE level as the point where the financial status of the family is most sensed. The result indicates that the HE level traverses all the income groups reported earlier by the participants. The level is home to the rich, average, poor and very poor participants. This is unsurprising having regard to the cost of HE relative to the other educational levels.

Table 9c: Participants' Educational Level Most Impacted by Financial Status of Family

Educational Level	Participants
JHS	-
SHS	4 (SP1, SP4, SP8, SP9)
HE	13 (SP3, SP7, SP10, SP11, SP13, SP14, SP4, SP15, SP16, SP17, SP18, GP1, GP2)
SHS & HE	SP5
All levels	SP2

Source: Interview transcripts.

The comments of SP2, a visually impaired participant who ranked the financial status of the family as a very poor and also reported that he has battled with financial challenges throughout his educational life suggest the persistence of persistent deprivation:

I felt it ever since I went to school; ever since I started basic school, up until now I'm still feeling it. Because the lady who decided to cater for me at a point in time, she could come to school, just come and take a shot of me and then she will leave. She wouldn't give me anything. So I have, like, I have felt this economic situation from childhood until now. (SP2, male, Political Science)

As someone coming from a single-parent home and brought up by the mother whose occupation he indicates as a peasant farmer, SP2 signals the chequered path to financing

his education to buttress the point that he has felt the negative impact of the family's financial status since childhood:

The lady [benefactress] decided to take it upon herself to support me up until I completed JSS [basic education]. So when I completed, she also said she was exhausted so she couldn't continue. Therefore, my Mum had to try her possible best to support me not forgetting that my Dad had neglected me since childhood; not me alone but me and my other sister from childhood...So when I got to SS [upper secondary] too, by the grace of God, some of my teachers saw the kind of potentials within me and decided to also support me. So up until now it's one of my madams who is supporting and one other gentleman who also saw me in school and decided to also offer his support. (ibid)

SP5 who also reported an average family income and described early on that the financial status of her family is currently negatively impacting her studies gave this reason for the choice of both the upper secondary and HE levels as those she has had financial stress. Both parents are self-employed in the informal sector of the economy:

I really felt it in the secondary school and currently it's still there, but then I have not gone through the entire stage so I can't really say it. But then, secondary school and then my stay in the university. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

The case of SP16 reasonably illustrates how parents' changing life situations and circumstances can either exert a positive or negative influence on the financing of the education of the child. A student from say an average income home can suddenly fall into the low income category in the event of death (as the instance of SP8), unemployment etc. of one of the parents or both. In the situation of SP16, the decision of the mother to resign her job and pursue further studies is taking a serious toll on the family's finances, and by extension, his own studies:

In JHS, I didn't have problem with my fees; my Dad could pay everything, full payment before school resumes. I got to SHS too the same thing, but it's now in the university whereby I'm feeling some financial stress because even my fees, I have not done full payment of my fees. So I'm just going for it to be endorsed so that I can go on with my registration...because at first my Mum was working so more money, but now she is also schooling so the rate has come down, that's it! So it's not easy, although, but it's OK. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

SP9 who had earlier argued that the financial status of the family did not in any way impact his educational choices, aspirations and success now recalls an experience at the SHS, which in his view, negatively affected the grade he made in Mathematics at the upper secondary school-leaving exam;

...I had to stay outdoors while others are writing exams because of fees; it gives an emotional kind of stress. Although, I didn't allow that to affect me, I just had to put up my best to make sure I come out with good results, but at the end of the day, it still had an impact on my results because with some subjects like Mathematics which I know I could get an 'A' so easily, I couldn't finish up with my answers during the theory paper and I could answer all 10 questions, but I did seven questions out of 10; and that is the

reason for scoring B2 instead of A1 in Mathematics at the SHS level. (SP9, male, Agriculture)

Like SP2, SP1 has mobility impairment. She recounts her frequent absenteeism while in upper secondary school, and how she had to feign sickness on some occasions, when in fact, the actual cause was that there was no money to take taxis to school on a daily basis as her condition demands:

OK when I was in the SHS. Yes, I couldn't go to boarding house because there was no money, and I had to be taking taxi to school in-and-out. It was something though. Sometimes I couldn't go school, most of the time I go to school, like maybe three times in a week and give an excuse that I was sick. So I was always sick, sick, sick but the actual problem was that there was no money for me to go school. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

SP15 and SP13 who are both pursuing their degree programmes as fee-paying students however, believe that it is at the university level that the financial status of their families is positively impacting their education, having regard to the high cost of pursuing the programme as a fee-paying option:

If it's financial then it's the university, because of the fee-paying (SP15, female, Nursing).

Of course, I'm doing fee-paying and it's the most I'm paying now, so its now, but then my Dad doesn't let you worry about that (SP13, female, Medicine).

Now in the second year of the programme, SP13 is paying academic fees amounting to GHC 7,488.00 (US\$ 1,957) for the 2014/2015 academic year excluding other fees such as that for accommodation⁷³. Her counterparts pursuing the same programme on the government subsidised slots as 'regular' students pay just 12.7% (GHC 952.73) of that amount as academic fees⁷⁴. That notwithstanding, SP13 tells me money is one of the things she does not worry about;

"...I don't worry about money. It is the least of my priorities".

Her experience is directly opposite that of other students like SP2, SP5, SP10, and SP16 who are very much worried about financing their education. SP7, SP11 and SP3 are among other students who maintain that it is at the university level that they are feeling the positive impact of the financial status of their families:

At the university level...Yeah, my fees, and then my residential fees. Because where I live the fees are quite high but my parents are still able to afford (SP7, female, Business Administration).

The university, because when the list came out for admission, we had to pay for hostel and fees. There was a deadline, you see, and if no one has [money]; there are people who

⁷³ <http://knust.edu.gh/admissions/fees/undergraduate-ghanaian-fee-paying-continuing-students> April 20, 2015

⁷⁴ <http://knust.edu.gh/admissions/fees/ug-fees-continuing>

didn't come because they couldn't afford it so they had to drop out even though they had qualified. (SP11, female, Engineering)

I think university. One, you need a laptop; if my parents did not have enough money they wouldn't have gotten me a laptop, and most of the time our lecturers give us soft copies - our handouts are soft copies and all of that. So, when you come to school sometimes you have to buy handouts, make photocopies and all these things. Let's say I'm going to write my long essay, I would have to travel to the Volta Region where most of my research will be done from, collecting data, and that will need financial support so if my parents are not that sound it will be a bother. (SP3, female, History)

6.6.4 Financial Status of the Family versus Academic Performance

The participants commented on whether or not the financial status of the family as reported by them has in any way affected their academic performance (positively or negatively).

Table 9d: Financial Status of Family versus Performance of Participants

Influence		Participants
Yes	Positively	5 (SP7, SP11, SP13, SP15, SP17)
	Negatively	3 (SP5, SP1, SP18)
No		7 (SP1, SP6, SP8, SP13, SP16, GP1, GP2)
Yes & No		3 (SP3, SP9, SP10)

Source: Interview transcripts.

As expected, SP15 and SP17, who indicated coming from a rich family are among those reporting that their academic performance has been positively impacted:

Oh yes, a lot! Because you don't really have those problems to think about; the school fees and everything, so you have a sound mind to learn (SP15, female, Nursing).

Yes, because Law is a very expensive course, you need to buy very expensive books and so yeah, I think it has influenced it in some way (SP17, female, Law).

On the contrary, SP5 argues that the financial stress she is going through is taking a toll on her academic performance:

OK, I will say my academics. Currently it's not the best that I expect, because you are getting pressures from different angles; the focus you need is not there, and it's like you try your best but there is no motivation...encouragement, no. But then, maybe you need money for something you don't get; it dampens your spirit and whatever you want to do you will not be able to put in your very best like you would have. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

While SP3 believes that a sound financial status of the family will facilitate academic performance, she does not see the same factor as a predictor of academic success:

OK I will say yes and no. Yes, in the sense that because they [parents] are putting in effort to make sure life is comfortable on campus for me, I also think I need to appreciate them by learning and all of that, yeah. And no because someone can also have all these resources put in place and will still not learn. (SP3, female, History)

A rather fascinating find from this indicator is that, unlike SP5, others with financial challenges proved to be resolute and resilient, using their deprivation rather as a source of motivation. For instance, SP10 and SP8 comment to the effect that their enrolment in the university presents them an opportunity for an upward social mobility, which they should seize to alter their fortunes in life:

Not necessarily. It has affected me but I'm able to go through it very well. I manage my time very well knowing very well that that is the thing I will do and one day come out of the situation. Despite that it has affected me. Sometimes I have to read the books, instead of me going through certain things to upgrade my knowledge about things, I have to use that time just to cater for my school fees, you understand? (SP10, male, Economics)

No, because whenever I go to school I try to remove my mind from whatever that is going on at home so that I can be able to concentrate and come out with the best results, best performance that I can possibly put up. So at the end of the day when I come out I can easily get a job or decide to set up my own corporation or business or something. (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

I never thought of those issues. I thank God I'm not the kind who normally sits down to think about such issues. I don't think about them so it never affected me (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate).

No, no, when I came in the first-year I was in Second Class Upper but, even though there was no money I said still I have to continue so I didn't drop; I was always increasing [the grade-point] to the end. So it didn't affect me in any way, it didn't affect me in any way. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

Although SP10 and SP8 enrolled in different universities, are just in the second year of their respective four-year bachelor's degree programmes, the performance put up by both GP1 and GP2 who did not only graduate with First Class, but also emerged as one of the best students in their departments is a pointer to their assertion that they did not allow the financial challenges they encountered in the course of their studies to 'distract' them. The circumstances of SP8 and SP10 further highlight the high expectations that low income students have about HE 'guaranteeing' them a place in the labour markets and improving their life chances. This category of students who often have poor social connections face a real threat to the realisation of this dream—graduate unemployment.

6.6.5 Upfront Tuition Fees and Charges

Although the study did not set out to seek the views of participants on this indicator, the analysis revealed that a number of participants— all from the low income category— were concerned about this situation. It is the policy of the public universities in Ghana that students pay their fees upfront before they are registered as students to begin the academic year. Students who cannot pay the full fees at the beginning of the academic

year, particularly, new entrants risk losing their studentship or the offer of admission as the case may be. The period for registration is usually two weeks and those who fail to meet the deadline must pay a fine or penalty in addition to the principal. Although in some cases, a part payment is accepted, the student would have to negotiate this personally with the authorities. Students have the option of borrowing from the SLTF but they are often faced with a *catch-22*; they cannot access the loan until they have been registered by the university as attending for the semester and academic year. Meanwhile, the registration also requires the payment of the fees for which a good number of students will need the loan to pay up.

Interestingly, the SLTF's admonition is this: "Loan is not meant for school fees. It is meant to support expenditures such as books & stationery, transportation, academic user fees, rent etc"⁷⁵. So, if the loan is not meant for tuition fees of what need will the loan that is meant to support other than tuition fees be if the student has not been able to pay the tuition fees to guarantee their studentship? Per Article 28 (5) of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana, any individual who has attained the age of 18 years and above is no longer a child, and if the official tertiary enrolment age in Ghana which is 18-22 years⁷⁶ is anything to go by, does the government and its agency (the SLTF) expect the adults (students) to depend on their parents for the fees? This policy, in my opinion, can hardly be justified on the grounds of equity.

Apart from the case of SP10 which I have extensively elaborated under affirmative action, SP16 was faced with the same situation at the time of the interview when his university had just resumed from recess for the 2014/2015 academic year. He shared with me the frustrations and the stress he has had to endure as a result of not returning to the university with the full fees for the academic year:

...I have not done full payment of my fees, so I'm just going for it to be endorsed so that I can go on with my registration...Last year, I didn't pass through this, I just came to school, in two days I was done with registration and I was in my room. I have never seen something like this before. This is the first time I didn't come with my full payment I have to walk here and there for it to be endorsed, something like that. Sometimes I get to my room, I get bored but I know it's a short time, I will pass through. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

Others who struggle to pay the fees are then faced with the task of dealing with the indirect expenses incidental to their studies. SP2 as a visually impaired student whose father is now deceased and the mother is also a peasant farmer pays the stipulated fees without any waivers, and his previous attempt to secure financial aid from his institution proved unsuccessful because according to information he shared post-interview and off-record, he could not produce the death certificate of his dead father to support his application for financial aid. With most burials in rural Ghana done without death certificates, this appeared to be a mission impossible for SP2. When I asked about

⁷⁵ <http://www.sltf.gov.gh/loan-process/qualification-requirements/> April 16, 2015

⁷⁶ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=GHA®ioncode=40540>

whether or not he was paying both the academic and residential fees, he answered in the affirmative. So I proceeded to enquire about money for living expenses to which he replied:

That is, even sometimes I come I don't bring it [money for living expenses] because like when they are done with the payment of the fees and then the residential and stuff, they are left with nothing. So I come and I would have to endure for some time, when my mother gets something, then she calls me to go for it. (SP2, male, Political Science)

So such a vulnerable student is virtually left to starve on campus despite all the other challenges he had to deal with as a student with additional needs. SP5 was in a parallel situation, regarding living expenses, at the time of the interview. The parents 'miraculously' manage to pay the fees though:

I don't feel the struggle; my parents feel it and they communicate that things are tough. But then, glory be to God anytime we have to pay fees, strangely or miraculously, we get the funds to pay so then I will not say that. For fees we pay the fees. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

She then had to battle with how to get money for living expenses:

That's where the issue [money for living expense] really comes. As for the fees if you don't pay the fees you can't enter, then after paying the fees how to get the money to survive becomes an issue (ibid).

As reported earlier, GP1 and GP2 had to contend with the same situation while pursuing the bachelor's degree. Others, mostly first-year students, also lacked knowledge about other financial commitments such as students' union fees, they had to make apart from the official university fees on campus, and were therefore left surprised and stranded:

Life over here, in fact, I will say it's very tough. Though I have not been here for long, but then me for instance when I was coming to school the little money I was given on me there was certain expenses, which of course, were not added. So all those money entered into those expenses. So as I sit with you right now, there is very little and there are a lot of things I haven't done; a lot of things! But then I'm still coping and trusting God that God will make a way and see me through. (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

Although GP2 had completed his undergraduate studies at the time of interview, he recalled going through the same ordeal SP18 in the first-year, is going through during his early days in the university:

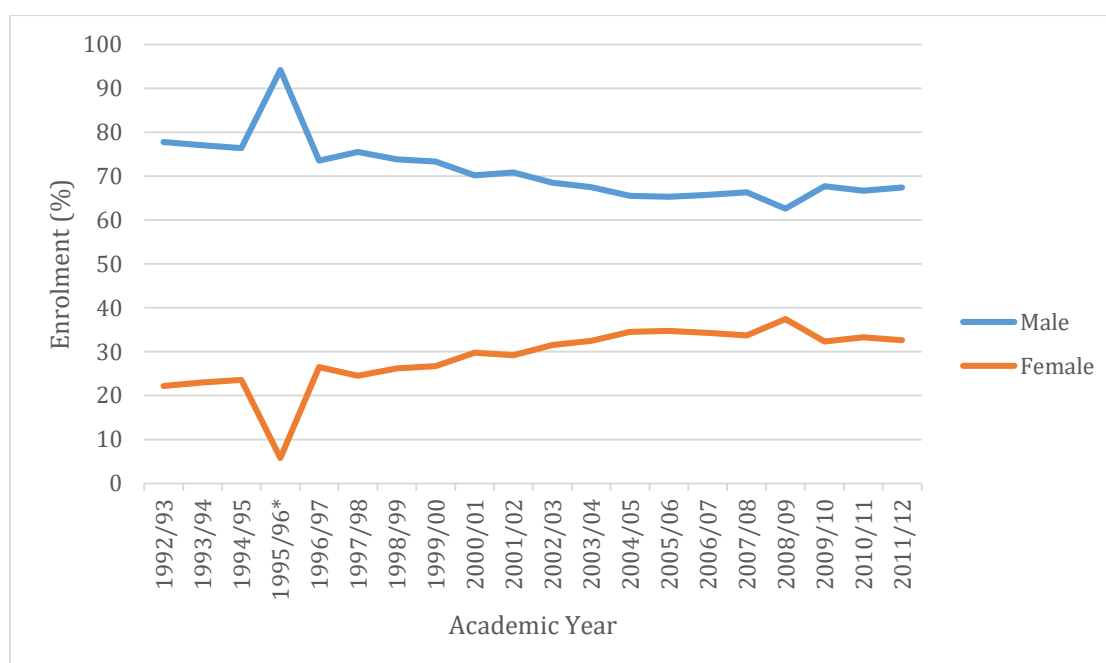
OK, the beginning, I paid the fees first. After paying the fees I didn't know that you have to go to the department do some registration, go to the faculty do some registration. So when you go here they tell you to pay this, when you go here they tell you to pay this. So I think the small things in my pocket I was using it to pay, at the end of the day nothing was in my pocket I said 'wow' ... (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

6.7 Gender

This variable sought to explore and understand why females in Ghana lag behind their male counterparts in access to HE. As Figure 3 illustrates, Ghana is far from achieving gender parity at the HE level although a few countries in SSA (Cape Verde, Mauritius and Namibia) have been able to do so. Figure 4 also demonstrated that both boys and girls have relatively the same enrolment ratios at the pre-primary and primary levels with the gap widening at the upper secondary level, and aggravating at the HE level. In fact, Ghana achieved gender parity at the primary level in 2012 (UNESCO, 2015). Figure 8 which tracks the distribution of enrolment in Ghana's universities for two decades shows the bridging of the gap between the sexes with the share of the male category reducing from a high of 77.8% in 1992/93 to 67.4% in 2011/12. The share of females has increased from 22.2% in 1992/93, peaked at 37.4% in 2008/09, but consistently plummeted in the intervening years to 32.6% in 2011/12 according to the data available at the NCTE.

The participants for this study responded to three key issues under this variable: (1) whether or not their gender (as female) has shaped their educational and career options; (2) the obstacles they have encountered in their educational life as a result of their gender (female); and (3) the ways in which the home and social environment contribute to some of the obstacles females face in their educational life. This part of the interview was mostly targeted at the women for obvious reasons.

Figure 8: Enrolment in Ghana's Public Universities by Gender 1992/93-2011/12



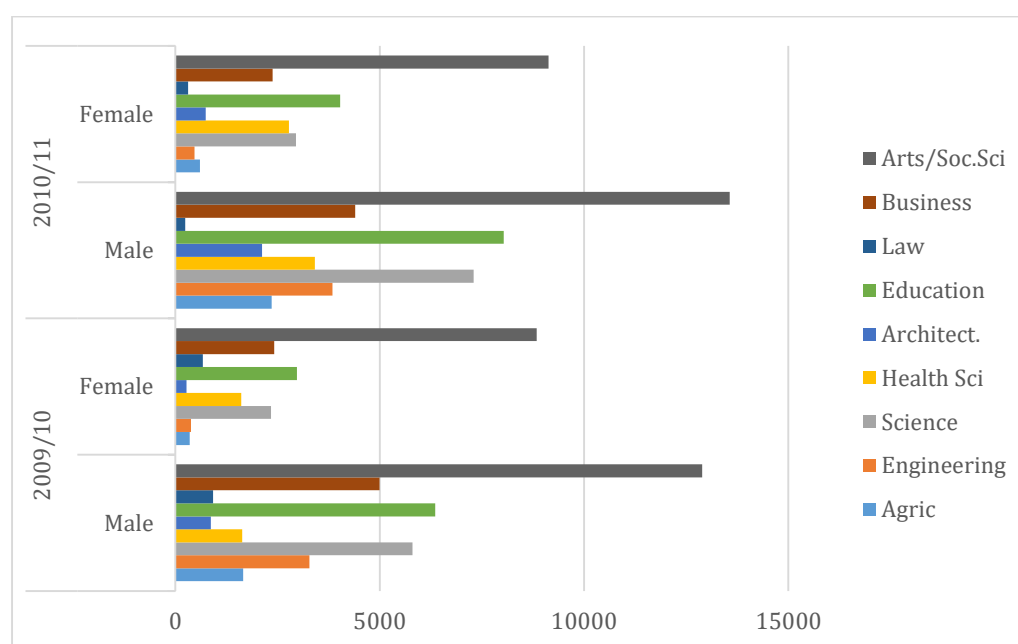
Note: * Low enrolment due to a yearlong strike action by academic staff.

Source: Author's construct based on NCTE 2013 data.

H6.7.1 Gender, Fields of Study and Career Options

As Figure 9a and 9b point out, the Arts/Social Sciences has been the most popular field for female applicants to Ghana's public universities with 8,839 (44.5%) out of a total of 19,849 female applicants choosing programmes in the field in 2009/10. In 2010/11, there was a similar pattern; 9,129 (39%) and 23,392 respectively. Architecture and Engineering were the least popular fields for the female applicants in 2009/10 with 1.4% and 1.9% applications, correspondingly.

Figure 9a: Undergraduate Applicants Qualified for Admission in Ghana's Public Univs. by Gender and Fields of Study, 2009/10-2010/11

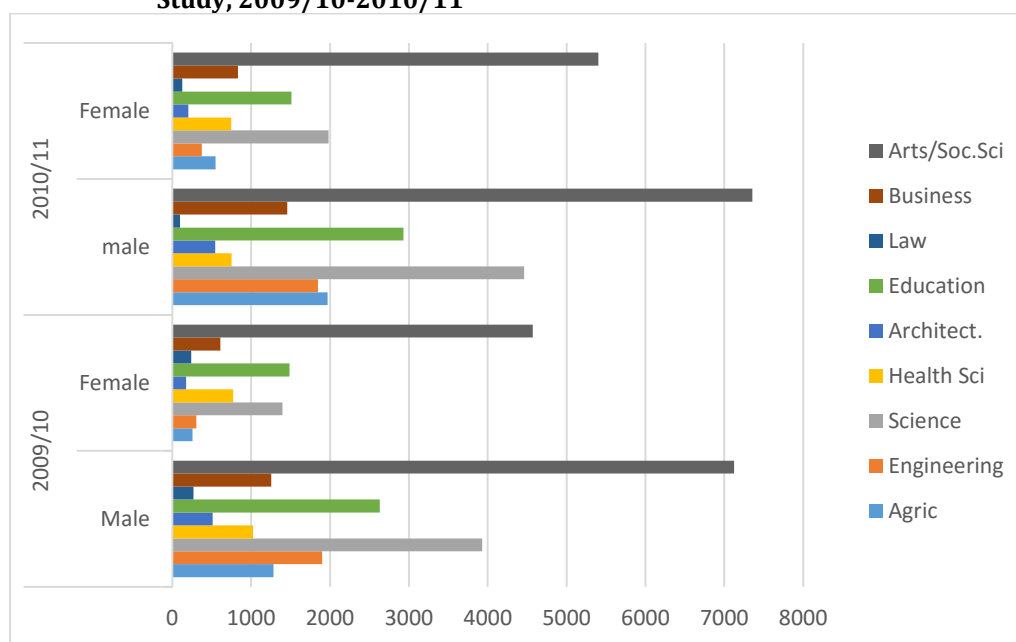


Note: The fields of study were based on NCTE's classifications.

Source: Author's construct based on NCTE, 2014 data.

For 2010/11, the share of Architecture inched to 3.2% and Engineering to 2.0%. The data available also show that almost half (46.5%) of the actual female admissions for 2009/10 went to Arts/Social Sciences. Architecture took 1.8% of the total female admissions for the same period. In 2010/11, the Arts/Social Science dominance continued with a 46.1% share of total female admissions, with Science succeeding it. Although, Law recorded the lowest share of female admissions for that year, nonetheless, the female share (125) dwarfed the male share (98) for that field. It is an interesting find, in that, with the exception of Law, female applications and admissions did not exceed that of the male category in any other field of study. The males outnumber the females both in the number of applications and admissions. This confirms the high male enrolment relative to the female in the public universities, as Figure 8 proves. Again, with the exception of a few fields of study, it can also be observed that the male applications and admissions follow roughly the same pattern as that of the females with Arts/Social Science, Education and Science being the most popular.

Figure 9b: Undergraduate Applicants Admitted to Ghana's Public Univs. by Gender and Fields of Study, 2009/10-2010/11



Source: ibid.

With the exception of SP3, SP5 and GP1 all the female participants reported that they did not allow their feminity to affect neither the fields of study nor their career options; and that, they did not see any of the disciplines as a 'no-go-area':

...I wanted to be a forensic scientist but initially I thought it wasn't a girl thing and all of that, so that was then, until I got to my third-year in the university and then I regretted not choosing that. So yes, I initially thought it was too scientific for a girl and it was more of a male this thing; dominated field, so why not just focus on something like Law and History and those things that can accommodate women. (SP3, female, History)

While SP3 followed her own instincts and abandoned the idea of pursuing a programme and a career in the sciences although she gave thoughts and considerations to the male-female divide in study fields, SP5 rather blames her Dad for talking her out of a career in Engineering, primarily, because of marriage and child-rearing:

Oh yeah, because I remember when I was about choosing my courses, I wanted to go in for an Engineering programme but my Dad was like, Engineering is for males so as a female I shouldn't go in for an Engineering course. But even though, he based on the fact that as a female you might grow and you definitely get married; you have to have time for your husband and your children. You, an engineer, you are very busy, how will you get the time for, so those are the kind of influences... (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

With the benefit of hindsight now, SP5 feels bitter about that action of her father who does not have a HE qualification:

I felt bad because something you want to do but because of circumstances and some reasons you can't do (ibid)

SP12's parents completed a university but she was faced with same influence SP5 had when she indicated to her parents her intention to pursue Architecture in the university. Unlike SP5, she defied attempts by her parents to dissuade her, using her femininity and even physique, from pursuing her dream programme:

...I remember when we were in SS [upper secondary] and were supposed to choose our subjects and I told my parents I was going to do Architecture they didn't see why me a girl, I should pursue Architecture. They were telling me 'you don't look like someone who can pursue Architecture. After all it's a male's job, and then it deals in building' so they don't see me doing; and my stature and everything, they said that I'm even slim and after all what am I going to do there? They don't see me going that far... (SP12, female, Architecture)

Now in the second-year of the programme, SP12 believes she has been able to prove her parents wrong, turning the obstacle into a promising spectacle;

...but when I'm here and they call me and they say 'Ei [name] and they say how are you doing?' And I tell them everything, they say 'Wow, so it's really a female job?' (ibid).

For GP1, the decision to pursue a career in academe was not influenced by her parents as was the case of SP5. She sees that option as a perfect fit for combining work and family life:

OK in a way. Because, me wanting to be a lecturer and all, I think I was getting, type of, a woman who will marry in future; yes, getting type of that; the reason why I want to be there. It's not the main reason, but it's part of my decisions, getting time. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

She will not, for marriage and family life, work in a financial institution for example:

Yes, I'm thinking that being at bank or/ I don't want to get any job that I will spend most of my time at the workplace, because at least you will become a family woman and you are working for money, for the kids. So if you are working for them and you are not able to take good care of them and all, is not necessary for the money so I think if I get enough time for them, it's better so that's how come...(ibid)

Some participants who had indicated that they did not allow their femininity to get in their way, still held the view that Engineering for example, is the preserve of their male counterparts:

No, I don't think that there are some disciplines that are no-go areas for females. But Engineering is the course that if you are a girl and you do it's a big deal, but for Medicine it's no news anymore; maybe it was news in the past but no it's no news. (SP13, female, Medicine)

SP11 who is pursuing Engineering sees her field as a male domain and she believes that she is swimming against the tide as a female pursuing Engineering, but she is however, giving no room for intimidation from her male counterparts. Rather, she is using her femininity to prove a point to the male counterparts:

We are 55 in number and we are only three girls so it's a little bit challenging. My group studies, they were all guys we were just like three girls, the rest are all guys. But because I'm a female in such an environment, I strive to be better because if the grades come and I do better than a guy I feel like, even you think you know, because guys are more engineering; they deal with what you want to pursue. As a girl I'd easily lose interest in Engineering, but because of the environment I find myself in, it actually pushes me to study hard...The fact that I'm a female didn't influence whether or not I want to offer Engineering....Girls are more into reading courses than technical courses like Engineering. (SP11, female, Engineering)

She makes reference to how she is warding off intimidation from her male classmates in the male-dominated Engineering class:

...I have been telling them, when you do something that makes me feel like because I'm a girl, I tell them that please stop being gender-biased, and we just laugh about it because you can't tell me; like drawing, I had challenges in drawing and it's like girls '*deg*' you can't draw but I wasn't moved by that. I will still do what I can do... (ibid)

Like SP11, SP17 is also trying to use her femininity to win the fight against male dominance:

...I felt like being a woman and doing Law is something that, definitely some men will try to look down on you, so you'd have to do something to stand out. So being a woman it actually pushed me to do better; to do better than the guys in my class. (SP17, female, Law)

In the opinion of SP12, the gendering of the fields of study, a phenomenon otherwise known as 'sex typing' (Jacobs, 1996; Moore, 1987; Wilson & Boldizar, 1990), emanates from the socio-cultural milieu:

...Science for instance, because of what it has in our minds, or let me say technical, most people say technical is for boys so if you are a girl and you apply for technical that means you can't do it or they see you as, you have this masculine thing or let me say tomboy. And then when people see you they talk behind you and stuff. And let me also say that this course too, Home Economics we also see it as feminine course and then if you are a boy and you are pursuing it that means in our local language you are '*ɔbaa barima*' [tomboy]. Yes, so they don't respect you, you don't get respect that other people get because of the mentality they have... (SP12, female, Architecture)

SP12 and SP11 also believe that the decision to pursue a degree in fields traditionally considered masculine was influenced by their upbringing – growing up with boys:

As a female, when I was growing up I didn't really have that feminine upbringing; I was always surrounded with boys because of my background and everything, so I used to learn stuff about boys a lot. So me when I came to study Architecture, I didn't see it as a male programme. I saw it as a programme for everything; and what a man can do a woman can do it better. (ibid)

We grew up with my cousins, so my house there were more males than females so I'm used to those; like boys giving you attitude and everything...so I'm used to the kind of things that comes out with me around guys. (SP11, female, Engineering)

The findings from this indicator, thus far, suggests that an interplay of factors: parental influence, socio-cultural norms, the home environment impinge on the horizontal stratification in the Ghanaian context. The sex typing of fields of study is deemed to be a worldwide phenomenon with varying manifestations in different contexts (Jacobs, 1996; Moore, 1987; Barone, 2011). The argument of Wilson & Boldizar (1990) to the effect that the segregation by fields of study occurs at the pre-HE levels is consistent with the findings from this study. Barone (2011) identifies two divides in regard to the gendering of the disciplines: the humanistic-scientific divide which is influenced by the curricula content of the degree programme, as well as the care-technical which relates to the subsequent career options. He adds that the choice of study fields is influenced by both considerations attributing the phenomenon to highly resistant cultural forces that are sustained by structural developments in institutions of education and occupation.

6.7.2 Obstacles Encountered

With the exception of GP1, none of the female participants reported any bullying, intimidation or sexual harassment from the basic, secondary and the HE levels:

I think at times in class, most of the times the guys, especially in the university and all that. At times the guys want to shut you down in class and all. Yeah, and when you ask questions [in class] they get bored. At times somebody wants to shout at you and all that, I haven't encountered, probably I don't take notice of it, but I haven't encountered much of such issues. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies)

Asked why the males would want to bully her, GP1 speculates her pedantic lifestyle and academic performance probably courted her those troubles:

My class [in the university] they thought I was like, they see me as somebody who learns too much, and they think that my average [grade point] and all; I don't know, but some people never liked me. (ibid)

This is the step she took to deal with the situation:

Oh, I warned the guy after class. I went to see him, I told him that we all paid school fees so he should allow me to function [laughter]. I warned him and he never did that again (ibid).

The finding largely contradicts earlier research such as that by Manuh et. al (2007) which reported among others that “high levels of transactional sex seem to be endemic on all campuses at all levels” (p. 138). Some participants however mentioned that the school environment itself sometimes contributes to the marginalisation of females in the Ghanaian society. SP13 for instance, points to the attitude of some teachers towards the excellence of females in class; they tend to pass comments deriding the males in the class for allowing a female to emerge as the best student or pupil in the class:

You can't change the way people think especially when they are all grown-ups; but if we could correct this from childhood, especially, when you are in school and the teachers don't / they like passing such comments like 'ɔbaa na eedi mo so first' [a girl is

outclassing you], do you get it? That means that it's as if a girl is not supposed to be there, a guy is supposed to be there. (SP13, female, Medicine)

SP3 also laments how the school system structures student leadership to the marginalisation of females. She does not understand why schools elect or appoint a Boys' Prefect and a Girls' Prefect as heads, but often allow the latter to play a subordinate role to the former, thus rendering the Girls' Prefect a plain figurehead:

...You want to be the Head Prefect, the Head Prefect would have to be a guy...In every senior high [school], that's if the school is not a single-sex school. You know, we have school prefect—the Boy's Prefect, the Girl's Prefect—but when they are looking for the Senior Head Prefect it's supposed to be a guy, yes! I think in every basic school I know. (SP3, female, History)

I asked her how she feels about this 'anomaly', and her response tells the anger and bitterness:

I think it's gender-bias. It's a cheat to me. I think it should be based on competence rather than like the fact that you are male or female. And I thought that was a challenge (ibid).

For SP5, the sex typing of household chores extends even to the school setting where only females are assigned the responsibility of cleaning the school environment – a common practise in Ghanaian basic and upper secondary schools:

...I think that's wrong; it's because of the rules we've defined for males and females. So then that's how it is. For instance, in class even when the duty rosters are made, you find it, it's very rare for you to see a male even on the duty roster to hold the broom that the person is sweeping, because we've made it seem that males are not supposed to sweep or to clean places; that's how it has become. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

Without question, the views of SP13, SP3 and SP5 point to the school as an agent of socialisation and a microcosm of the larger society, reinforcing and reproducing the marginalisation of females which it is well-positioned to effect a change. Although none of the participants touched on the content of the school curricula itself, which has also been found to be contributing to the gender divide. Textbooks for primary schools for example, portray only males as medical doctors and engineers while nurses are pictured as women. Patriarchal tendencies are also manifest at the lower levels of education where female teachers play a second fiddle to their male counterparts and recalcitrant adolescent boys would resist disciplinary actions from female teachers; and in some cases, assault them because they see it as feminising to be disciplined by a female teacher, and for that matter, the male teachers are the ones to bring such pupils under control. Thus, early on in the educational continuum, the school system assigns and confines roles to children with which they grow up, culminating in sex typing in fields of study at the HE level and career paths thereafter.

6.7.3 The Home and Socio-cultural Milieu

With the exception of SP14 who declined to comment on this subject, all the female students and the graduate, unanimously fingered the structure of the home and the

social-cultural environment as putting impediments in the way of women in regard to education, and also contributing to their marginalisation in the Ghanaian society. Some participants made reference to the gender divide in the allocation and performance of domestic chores as limiting the education of females:

...Those of us who went to school in the same town like where our parents were, and staying in the house, you have to cook and do everything as normal before you come to school, and I think it takes some of our time. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

...When you are at home, you are like, females are supposed to be in the kitchen; they are supposed to be cooking and doing all the kitchen stuff while the boys are sitting down doing nothing, whereas they could have helped, yeah! And sometimes too, you get visitors at home and you are busily doing something and they will ask you to go and serve the visitors because you are a female, because females are supposed to serve visitors and not guys; so sometimes they do. And I will say because my parents are traditional people, they like this female, female thing. For instance, **my Dad will never allow my brothers to serve him or to wash his clothes; it's the girls, the girls, the girls, yes!** (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work, emphasis added)

The solution to the unequal playing field for women in education, according to SP1, should start from the home:

...The whole thing can change from home. If they stop this female, female thing the ground can be levelled for everyone to compete. Yes, so they should stop that female duties and chores from home so that they will give both the guys and girls equal opportunity to study and then when you don't make it as a female you know that you didn't try, not because there was a limitation, yeah! (ibid)

This finding is consistent with the results of the GLSS 5 about the uneven division and gendering of domestic chores and the impact on the time available for girls to study discussed in Chapter Four. It further reflects the argument of Godwyll (2008) that the assignment of social roles to males and females in Ghana coupled with certain cultural practices present different layers of inequality between the sexes. The phenomenon is however, not restricted to the Ghanaian context, but appears to be prevalent in developing countries (UNESCO, 2015; Lyon et al., 2013; Dreibelbis et al., 2013; Keilland, 2015; Nankhuni & Findeis, 2004).

The case of SP15 whose father is a medical doctor and the mother a nurse, and who also reported coming from a rich family is an aberration. She argues that she sometimes swaps roles with her male siblings; and that there is no hard and fast rule about who does what in her home. Her case suggests that our understanding of the phenomenon should be nuanced:

Well, I mostly do the cooking and my brothers do the washing, the ironing and other stuff. But then, sometimes they come to help me and I also help them as and when needed. So it's not really a cut-out thing. If the person is available / I don't really believe in this is for guys, this is for ladies. I don't really require any social script to [wash?]. (SP15, female, Nursing)

Participants also reported that certain social beliefs and popular opinions such as that confining women to the kitchen, child-bearing and child-rearing, and also expect them to marry and become housewives, tend to limit the aspiration of women in education:

Most at times when you are a girl and you are going far, they don't see it as beneficial because they say after all she will get married and the husband will not even allow her to go to work; that means the woman will be a housewife. So if you are a woman and you want to pursue more in life, they tend to bring you down; they talk a lot about you: 'Oh, what you are going to do at the end 'koraa' [even] you become a housewife so I don't see why you should do it'. (SP12, female, Architecture)

SP3 sees the kind of roles assigned to men and women in the Ghanaian society as a kind of social contract which subjugates the latter and privileges the former:

...In Ghanaian society, it's like this; when a woman is married she is expected to cook for the husband, take care of the house and all those things. So most of the time the men in the home, even when he is in the home, even when he is free he is still waiting for his wife to come back and come and cook for him and all those kind of things. So I think the way society has been male-dominated, and we have been made to believe that men are supposed to be the superiors over women; so it's like, they take care of us kind of thing, so ours is to serve them, be submissive to them and all those kind of things and they in turn will protect us and take care of our needs and all of that. So I think it challenges the woman in the sense that she is not able to reach out for her dream, so it's like the woman is pigeonholed, she cannot reach out for things the men will reach out for... (SP3, female, History)

SP11, SP5 and GP1 also touched on the pigeonholing of women SP3 alluded to, with SP11 in particular pointing to the fact that highly educated women are perceived to be independent, annoying and bossy:

Yes, because people think that whatever you do you end up in the kitchen. Whatever you do, they say women in authority are 'someway'; they think they are independent. So if you are woman who is well educated if you start doing your master's now people start seeing you living a different life; like, society kind of brands you: 'You will be like those women in authority— annoying, bossy'. Yes, because that is the attribute of society to women who are highly educated. It will take lot of, I don't know how to put it; you will have to stand it because it won't be easy. People will tell you: 'Ah you, after school you are going to get married and give birth so why should you bother yourself, why should you study and go and live in your husband's house?'... (SP11, female, Engineering)

Well, I think it has to do with our social beliefs. They've defined certain roles for females and certain roles for males like typically females were supposed to be housewives so you don't really go to school and attain, and get to such a high level. Just get some knowledge and you stop, you come home, you sit at home, your husband does everything; he brings the money. So it's like right now, job, patience, some occupations have been branded those for males and then others go for females... (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

...Some people still have the notion that females shouldn't be studying much because at the end of it all, they will marry and be in the kitchen. Even in my class some guys were telling me that after learning and all I will still be in the kitchen so I should stop learning

and forget about it. So I think how we perceive ladies at times affects us also. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

In response to GP1's comment I asked whether the perceptions, comments and taunts of his male counterparts were limiting her aspirations. Her response was one of resilience, denial and a partial acceptance of the 'kitchen status':

No, I have never seen myself in the kitchen. I have been telling them that if my father wanted me to be in the kitchen, he wouldn't have sent me to the university. So I think that I have something better doing aside being in the kitchen, so I have never thought of those issues, it never limited me. (ibid)

SP3 agrees with SP11 on the low aspirations of women for higher levels of education and to occupy positions of authority in society. To substantiate, she indicates that most of the females in the university have marriage on their minds after completing their bachelor's degree as a result of the limitation society has placed on them while their male counterparts have higher aspirations beyond the first degree:

...For instance, in the university most of the girls here after school are thinking of how to get married, but a guy is thinking of how to build his future before getting married. So right after school a woman is expected to get married. So it's like she's already being limited, but the guy can just go in get / they say, a woman under normal circumstances; society expects that a woman should be in the kitchen and all of that, she should not go out and compete with the men. Even men complain a lot when they see women moving ahead in the professional this thing, and it's like the professional women are disrespectful people and all those things... (SP3, female, History)

For SP17, the 'over-education' of a woman can blight her chances of getting married because most men are afraid to marry highly educated women, which in turn affects a woman's ambition for higher educational qualifications:

...I know some men are afraid of women who have PhDs and I think that is a barrier; because if you are a single woman and you have your master's degree, men are scared of you. So a lot of women don't really think about getting a PhD unless they are already married and they decide, but for single women they have that perception that a man will be afraid of you and all that, so it doesn't really push them to go further. (SP17, female, Law)

The comments of SP17 prompted me to ask where marriage and family life sit in her own plans. She revealed:

Marriage will be when I'm around 27 and I would have graduated by that time, I would have been done with Law School by the time. And I think I will be starting my master's around that time. (ibid.)

Asked as to how she will manage further studies with marriage and possibly children, SP17 indicated that she has seen other women do that so she will be able to effectively manage that situation. In response to SP3 who had lamented that the majority of females in the university are setting their eyes on marriage just after school—a situation she attributes to what she calls pigeonholing of women by society—I asked if she was ready

to join the bandwagon, and whether or not her thought pattern has been dominated by marriage being in the final year of her degree programme. Her comments indicate that she was willing and ready to challenge that tradition:

Yeah, I think that after school I also want to build my life. It's one thing, it's good to have a rich husband but it's also good to make yourself rich so you also raise your standard. I have a lecturer she is married to, her husband is also a lecturer and they are both doctors [PhD degree holders]. So something like that I think it's understandable. To me it's fair that we both give each other the chance to develop ourselves and even reach for our goals; so it's like I have to sit back and you go for yours. So I also think that the next thing after school is not supposed to be marriage. I will be 22 when I complete so I don't see why I should rush into marriage. I should rather think of building my life, at least three, five years' time, yeah. (SP3, female, History)

As far as this study goes, the female participants were found to be 'playing the victim' and blaming an external agency—the society—for the marginalisation of women. Apparently, they attribute the situation to some social constructionism and engineering, as the comments of SP3, SP5, SP12 and SP13 below exemplify:

...You know gender is a social construct thing. So society is the one that shapes you to believe that as male or female this is what you are supposed to wear. Women are supposed to wear skirts and men; so it's like that thing has been there. (ibid.)

They've defined certain roles for females and certain roles for males like typically females were supposed to be housewives so you don't really go to school and attain... Some people have realised that the roles that society has defined for them, they are actually... not a standard thing you are supposed to follow. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

...If you are a woman and you want to pursue more in life, they tend to bring you down... so I think those behaviour of the society it should be really looked into and then advise not to do it again because it's shattering other people's dream. (SP12, female, Architecture)

...Here in Ghana, if you are driving and the moment they see you are female, they think you are doing something wrong (SP13, female, Medicine).

Others (SP15, SP11, and SP5) however argue that communities peopled by highly educated individuals tend to be more supportive of women's education. SP11's comments on women driving their cars for example, contrast with that of SP13 on the same subject:

...If you live in an educated community you will actually not see more of this. Like, in my area, there is a man who lives in my house; he is always on me like, study. He says he likes women who drive their own cars, so it prompts [encourages] me... (SP11, female, Engineering)

6.7.4 Emotions

After the participants have expressed their thoughts regarding the impediments the home and social environment pose to the education of females, I also asked how they feel

about the impediments they were alluding to. Their comments suggest anger and frustration:

They really annoy me, but I just close my eyes to them (ibid).

I don't feel fine about it because it's not good (SP12, female, Architecture).

I don't like it. I really dislike it. I don't like people who look down, do sexes up like, differentiating between boys and girls and what a boy can do and what a girl can do (SP13, female, Medicine).

OK sometimes it's annoying. I don't really agree to that so sometimes we have some petty quarrels at home, yeah. And I'm trying to tell them that it's not always have to be like the female, female, female; the guys too can also do, yet still they don't understand so, I just take it like that. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

SP7's sounds rather fatalistic about the situation:

Well, it's natural, it's meant to happen but I think its somehow; although it may not, it may seem unfair, but I think that's how we were made to (SP7, female, Business Administration).

On the issue of the impediments to women's education from social controls, perceptions and practices, particularly at the HE level, all the female participants indicated that they want the status quo to change, recommending transformative remedies through behavioural changes:

No, they should be educated, because if you make such a statement I know you are an ignorant person because no educated person will tell you that whatever I do I will end up in the kitchen, do you get me? Gone are the days when the highest position you can get to in an office is a secretary, gone are those days! Now we have women who are running their own companies, so if people are still thinking this way, I think maybe they would have to be educated, they would have to be like enlightened about what women can do when they are put in such positions. (SP11, female, Engineering)

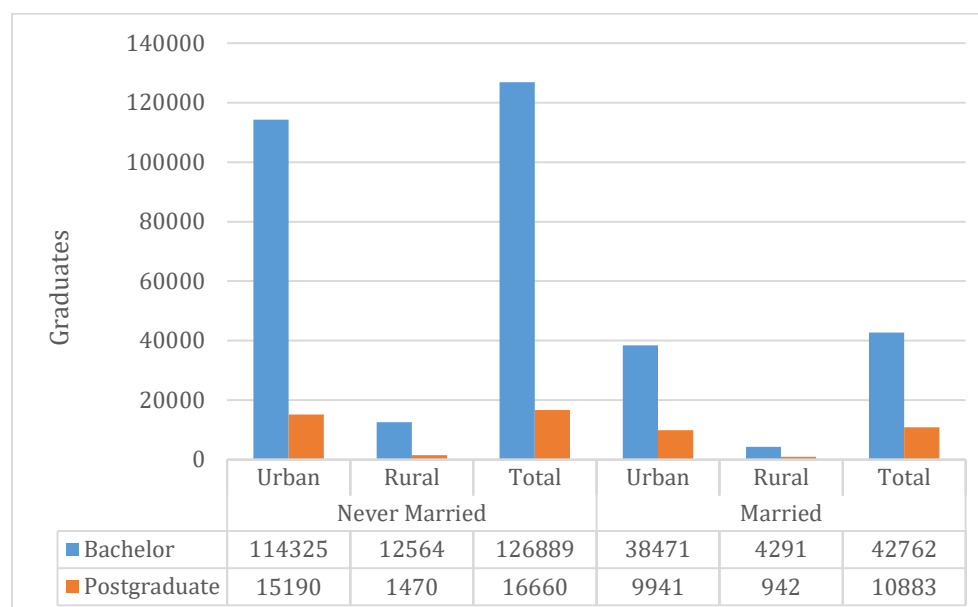
I think with time they will change, right now they don't get it, they don't understand. When you try to tell them they think you are being disrespectful. So I think with time they will get to understand. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

You can't change the way people think especially when they are all grown-ups, but if we could correct this from childhood especially when you are in school...I can't say I will go and stand somewhere and challenge it but any small thing I can do at the corner... (SP13, female, Medicine)

The concerns expressed by the participants, particularly, with regard to marriage do not diverge markedly from some previous research on the subject. Some contend that in the 1950s and 1960s most women in the United States for instance, were drawn to HE largely, to better their prospects of marrying a husband with a HE qualification; and that about 57% of women graduates married before or within a year of graduation. However, in the succeeding years the career dimension of HE displaced the marital dimension for women enrolling in HE, and by the 1980s the marriage promotion aspect of HE for women rather

started assuming a marriage-inhibiting tendencies (Goldin, 1995; Jacobs, 1996; Solomon 1985). As a developing country with a relatively low female enrolment in HE, the findings from this study suggests developments in Ghana following a similar trajectory.

Figure 10: Marital Status of Women Graduates in Ghana, 2010



Source: Author's construct based on Table 25, GSS (2013: 100,101).

Figure 10 representing the latest population census data, clearly shows that urban women have higher educational attainment than their rural counterparts, which is predictable due to the low number of rural girls who persist to the HE level. It further shows that the number of women who have attained a bachelor's degree and have never married to be thrice as much as that of their counterparts who have married. Although the same holds for the postgraduate degree holders the gap is not as marked as that of the bachelor category. This could be due to the fact that a good number of women enrol in postgraduate programmes after marriage, potentially, to avoid the risk of being unmarried due to the high educational attainment, as some female participants hinted. It is however, bothersome that the number of the never married postgraduates exceed those married, confirming the concerns expressed by participants like SP3 and SP17. This position is reinforced by the fact that in the Ghanaian context, a woman with a postgraduate degree may be considered 'overdue' for marriage, and particularly so, due to the low throughput for graduate degrees in the HEIs.

It should also be noted, that in the Ghanaian context the bride price (dowry) paid by men to the family of the woman before the marriage is consummated is often indexed to the educational attainment of the prospective bride. Thus, a woman with an upper secondary qualification as her highest educational attainment, would have a lower bride price relative to another with a HE qualification. The dowry also tends to be more expensive for an urban woman relative to her rural counterpart. Expensive dowries also make most men delay the marital process, since they more or less have to be financially sound to

venture into the institution of marriage. Increasing graduate unemployment exacerbates this situation.

6.8 Geographical Location

Under this theme, the participants (students and graduates) were asked how they would describe themselves – as rural⁷⁷ or urban persons. They also reported their regions of origin and residence and further commented on the role played by their place of origin or residence in their access to education in general. Finally, the participants assessed the chances of both the urban and the rural student in regard to their aspirations for, and access to university education in Ghana.

Table 10a: Localities of Participants – Self-reported

Area	Number	Participants
Rural	5	SP2, SP10, SP18, GP1, GP2
Urban	15	SP1, SP3, SP4, SP5, SP6, SP7, SP8, SP9, SP11, SP12, SP13, SP14, SP15, SP16, SP17

Source: Interview transcripts.

The number of participants who described themselves as urban was threefold that of their counterparts who regard themselves as rural people as to Table 10a illuminates. In fact, all the five participants who identify as rural folks came from only one of the two public universities selected for this study. Results of the 2010 Population and Housing Census indicate that the urban and rural population of Ghana are almost on par; approximately 12.5 million and 12.1 million respectively (GSS, 2013:11). This does not mirror the findings of this study, although the size of the sample for this study should not be discounted. It is worthy of note that the participants who described themselves as rural also reported either low or no parental education (except GP1 whose father has a HE qualification), and family incomes belonging to either the very poor or poor categories. This confirms the postulations of Corver & Dorling (2005) to the effect that geographical inequalities in access to HE is not an isolated phenomenon, but one reflecting the broader geographical inequalities in society and the home environment, which tend to depreciate the value of affirmative action at the HE level. The inverse, to a substantial extent, also holds true for those calling themselves urban (see Tables 8a & 9a).

Participants for the study also resided predominantly in three of the ten administrative regions of Ghana, notably the Greater Accra Region which is the capital region. The two case institutions are located in Greater Accra and Ashanti⁷⁸. Remarkably, three regions had none of the participants originating or residing there.

⁷⁷ The definition of the Ghana Statistical Service (2013) of a rural locality as one with a population of less than 5,000 and an urban locality as one with 5,000 or more was adopted for the study.

⁷⁸ See Appendix 1 for the map of Ghana.

Table 10b: Regions of Origin and Residence of Participants

Region	Origin	Residence
Ashanti	SP13, SP14	SP13, SP14, SP15, GP1
Brong Ahafo	-	-
Central	GP1, SP4, SP9, SP15, SP16	SP4, SP8, SP9
Eastern	SP1, SP6, SP7, SP8, SP11, SP17	SP1
Greater Accra	SP5	SP3, SP11, SP12, SP5, SP6, SP7, SP16, SP17
Northern	-	-
Upper East	-	-
Upper West	SP10	SP10
Volta	SP2, SP3	SP2
Western	SP18	SP18

Source: Interview transcripts.

The patterns observed in this study does not differ significantly from previous research on this subject reporting that 75% students in Ghana's public universities originate from five of the ten regions (Eastern, Greater Accra, Central, Ashanti and Volta) with 70% residing in only three regions (Manuh et al., 2007; Anyan, 2011) discussed in the literature review (see Figure 5).

6.8.1 Influence of Location on Access to Education

With the exception of SP2 and GP1, all the participants reported that their geographical location impacted their access to education. While those who described themselves as urban revealed that being in the urban area positively impacted their education, their rural counterparts thought their educational fortunes could have been enhanced if they had been in an urban area. The common themes running through the comments of the urban were the availability of teachers, better educational facilities and other basic social amenities as SP11, SP5, SP6, SP8 and SP17 admit:

Yes, because being in Accra means I have easy access to a lot of things like electricity, like water, but if I was in Kwahu or maybe some rural part of Ghana, I would have to go fetch water in the morning before I go to class. But this is the situation when I wake up in the morning, I will go and open my tap and I will take my bath and someone will have to walk some long distance, before you get to class, you get to school you are even tired and everything. Maybe I will pick a bus to school but you will walk a lot of miles to school, so being in Accra shaped, it actually influenced my access to education. (SP11, female, Engineering)

Oh I think, it's made education very easy and accessible because everywhere you went you found school, so it's like you don't/ the schools were all over so then why wouldn't you go to school? And because the place was urban the people there are learned people [they] can, teach you something... I didn't have to struggle for stuff; books were around; the libraries were around. So you can learn stuff, go for fairs, seminars and other stuff; so things were quite easy. As compared to me being in a rural area, I don't think I would have had those opportunities that I had. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

Accra has the best of teachers, because most of the teachers don't want to go to the rural areas and Accra is like the capital so most of the nation's resources... that you need to help you build yourself are in Accra. Yes, it has really helped me. (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

Oh, it has made access to education, really very easy... (SP8, male, Economics & Information Studies)

Yes, it played a very big role, because in Accra there are lots of schools, very good access to get into schools and very good schools in Accra. So living in Accra played a very important role in my life. (SP17, female, Law)

For SP16 and SP11, however, with the trappings of rural life being absent in the capital region, residents there have no other option than to pursue education because of the scarcity of farmlands. The peer influence in the urban centres is also geared towards education:

...I will say yes because in Greater Accra Region, normally my Dad has been saying if you are in a rural area what they know is farming. You wake up in the morning, you move to the farm, but in Greater Accra Region, you don't even have a land you are going to farm, so the only thing you have is education. So if your peers or your friends are going to school, and you decide to stay in the house then you are doing your own self... but with the rural areas, something like that is not there so if you are going into education they see you like, so in Greater Accra the situation pushed me. (SP16, male, Political Studies)

With the official national language of Ghana being English, others (SP3, SP5, SP6 and GP1) also argue that being in the urban area gives one opportunity to get a good grasp of the language earlier in their educational life, but the situation is different for their rural colleagues:

Yes, yes being in Accra made a contribution, because if I were to school somewhere in the Eastern Region or Ashanti Region where they speak more of Twi, I wouldn't have been good in English as I am... (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

...For instance, you see someone then the person starts speaking English from childhood and the child goes to school, and the child already understands English so education is much smoother; maybe as compared to the rural areas people are not educated, there are no facilities. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

Although SP3 is a native of the Volta Region, she has virtually lived in Accra all her life but she still maintains contacts with her roots and voluntarily travels to her hometown to teach basic school pupils when her university is on recess. She told me she was appalled by the proficiency of the pupils there in the English Language; a situation that compels

her to combine both the local language and English when teaching. She believes that her folks there are prepared for failure and questions how they will succeed in the BECE. She claims that people in Greater Accra are better-situated. Indeed, a study conducted by Hurd & Johnson (1967) on stratification in education in Ghana almost five decades ago, had concluded that children from homes where the English language is spoken on a daily basis tend to have enormous advantage over their counterparts from less educated homes, when they enrol in schools where English is the medium of instruction:

...Comparing myself to the people in my hometown; I go to my hometown every vacation since I entered the university to do a voluntary service. I teach the students in JHS; one, most of them don't speak English...Anytime I go and teach them I have to mix the Ewe with English, you get me? And it's quite a disappointment because this person is supposed to go and write BECE, so what is he going to write?...But at least in Greater Accra, most of the people have access to English, you can speak English Language, one; two, the books too are there. In some of the schools there are libraries and all those kind of things, so yeah. (SP3, female, History)

GP2 and SP18 describe themselves a rural. Whereas the former believes his educational life would have been smoother as an urban person, citing the possibility of getting personal loans from gainfully employed people, the latter recounts how rural life and its accompanying teenage pregnancy brought an abrupt end to the education of his brilliant sister:

OK yeah, I think so. If I had been in the urban area I would have also gained some access, because considering the people in the rural area, all from the farming activities, from the trading; but if you are in the urban area you get somebody who is also working in a high level institution who can give you some kind of loan to further your education or go ahead, so it would have been better if I had lived in the urban area. (GP2, male, Economics Graduate)

I will say yes, where you are, your region. For instance, let me use my hometown as an example; most people over there you could see they may be very brilliant but along the line due to, I will say, lack of certain education in their lives, teenage pregnancy...I was having another sister who was very brilliant. In fact, none of us performed like she was doing in her basic education; but along the line due to lack of knowledge or ignorance, she ended up bringing forth a child which ended her education. So in fact where you are has certain influence... (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

SP18 further indicated that he had learned from experience from the upper secondary school that the rustic life was going to pose a challenge for him, having set his eyes on enrolling in a university where he would have to mingle with the highbrowed, urban counterparts. So he had to adopt some measures that would help deal with the problem, hence the decision not to stay in his village;

...during my secondary school for instance, I learnt a lot because you could see life was different. Someone may come from Accra and a whole lot, but you from the village always farm, farm activities. So there was some sort of difference, but then, I took it upon myself that I have to bridge that gap and then be ready to learn; assume that surely I don't know certain things so I must learn. So I took it upon myself and corrected my mistakes; the way I used to speak to people, the way I used to handle things. It was one

of the main reasons why I didn't want to stay at that place, because I know definitely I will be going to the university which, of course, we have even some international students; so if your lifestyle is something else, it will be very difficult to cope with them. So I had to stay with certain people in Takoradi⁷⁹, some were my colleagues and then learn most of the things. Sometimes I was even going to some radio stations and look at how things were being done; listen to programmes, listen to talks and going to some seminars. So by the grace of God though I come from a typical village, I have been able to train myself in certain ways to make it easier for me to handle certain issues which concerns dealing with some people from the towns and then cities. (ibid.)

The case of SP18 is not an isolated one, other participants (SP10, GP1, and GP2) who described themselves as rural and who also double as low-income individuals had to contend with inferiority complex and low self-esteem at the point of HE. It again highlights the adjustment and issues of poor self-image students from disadvantaged backgrounds battle with at the HE level, Berg (2010) makes reference to.

6.8.2 Prospects of Rural and Urban Students in Accessing HE

There was unanimity among all the 16 participants who gave their opinions on this issue that urban students stand a better chance of enrolling in HE relative to their rural counterparts. GP1 rated the prospects of the urban relative to the rural in their quest for university education as 99% and 1% respectively, while SP8 assigned 80% chance to the former and 20% to the latter.

Another group of participants argued that urban students tend to draw a lot of inspiration from those already enrolled in the university as well as those who have completed, but in the rural areas the completion of even a basic education would pass as a remarkable achievement due to the absence of role models. SP9, SP4 and SP11 represent this group. For SP11, the mere sight of a university in the urban setting should inspire the people there to pursue HE:

Chances of a student from an urban area making it to the university is very high as compared to chances of students in the rural areas. Because in the rural areas there are very few people to look up to, there are very few people to talk to and even when a student didn't do so well in examinations, resitting for the examination in the urban areas it's quite easy as compared to the rural areas.... So on these two bases, I will say the chances for a student from an urban area going through the tertiary is quite higher than that for the student in the rural area. (SP9, male, Agriculture)

Well, the urban people have a higher chance of access, because the environment alone inspires you to do more. But say if you go the rural where nothing inspires you to push harder or reach the limit, you might not be motivated enough to access university education. Because in Accra if you finish high school [upper] and you are at home you don't even feel comfortable; but some places in the rural areas even if you finish junior high school [JHS] it looks like you've done your best...but if you are in the urban areas, and you see everything that's going around you, you are motivated, and you are able to do what you have to do to access education. (SP4, male, Engineering)

⁷⁹ The Western Regional capital and one of the most important cities in Ghana.

...If I'm in Accra and I pass by Legon [UG], even just seeing the school is going to whet my appetite to be here, you see. But if I'm in the rural...I will just stay in my village, you grow up then you become a village champion. Like, I'm the star in the village. But if you are in Accra, you see people, you see what the university has done to people. In the rural, you don't get to see, you don't get to get a lot of role models there because everyone is just farming or maybe fishing or carpenter or something... (SP11, female, Engineering)

SP5, SP13, SP18 and GP1 represent another group of participants emphasising that children in the urban areas have a better exposure which gives them a solid foundation in education and also gives them an edge over their rural counterparts. The views of SP18 and GP1 who identify themselves as rural are particularly important, it is interesting though, that both participants from the two divides objectively agree on this point:

...Basically, because of the exposure and everything; the one in the urban centre has the exposure, the experience, and the one in the rural area, nothing. Even the schools you attend the facilities are not there... so actually, putting both of them on the same scale, definitely the one in the urban area has greater opportunity than the one in the rural area. (SP5, female, Biochemistry)

...Someone in the village will not even have light to even study. They don't even have the exposure to know that such an SHS will give me the kind of foundation I need to go to the university, and out of ignorance, will choose maybe a second-class school...It's still the urban person getting the better schools. (SP13, female, Medicine)

Surely those in the cities stand a better chance because they have been introduced to a lot... (SP18, male, Mechanical Engineering)

...Those in the urban area even the school that you attend; because even where I'm teaching now Class One can speak very good English because the parents speak English with them in the house..., so Class One, five years is speaking this good English. Go to the rural area and see, even JHS can't write good English. So their exposure, and things they are exposed to, really help them to gain easy access to the university because the foundation is good so it helps. So 99 [% chance] for urban, one for rural area. (GP1, female, Publishing Studies Graduate)

SP10 who represents all the facets of disadvantage (low-income, no parental education, rural, both parents as peasant farmers and from one of the poorest regions in Ghana), and who but for affirmative action would not have been able to enrol in the university forcefully argues that if a rural person finds themselves in the university, it is sheer luck and that, the rich in the Ghanaian society can easily 'buy their way' through education:

Those who are well-to-do in a way they have a greater chance of getting good education and those of us who have / if sometimes we do have luck, it's really luck that bring some of us up this way, if not looking back at home most of my friends are still struggling. Even some of them are not even thinking of furthering their education because of the financial status. And if we look at those who are well-to-do, even if they are not able to perform, their parents are able to contact the institution and do a lot of things just to make sure that they go, you see? But those of us are who are up there [northern regions] who have financial challenges we are always willing to learn but the support is not coming, that is the issue we are facing. (SP10, female, Economics)

Although SP17 is at the opposite pole with respect to socio-economic background (rich family, very high parental education and occupation, urban) she agrees with SP10 on how students from advantaged backgrounds leverage their parental social connections to access HE:

...I believe most urban children are very lazy; coming to university is based on their parents' connections compared to those from the less-endowed schools who have to really learn hard to get in. (SP17, female, Law)

Apart from the views of both the student and graduate to the effect that urban dwellers are better placed to access HE than their rural counterparts, the public and HEI officials interviewed for the study also share the same views as the comments of GOP1 below indicates:

Well, it is true that the rural schools are very much disadvantaged. But the point is this; the universities themselves have realised it, so they have put in place certain measures to give some sort of admission to students from very deprived areas...

GOP1 is obviously making reference to the affirmative action interventions being implemented by some of the public universities discussed earlier. Despite his concession of the disadvantaged position of the rural folks, he also argues strongly that the rural students are now faring better and in some cases outperforming those in the elite schools due to some interventions the government has put in place such as training programmes to re-orient teachers in rural schools:

...But I must also add that this time around unlike the previous years where those in the deprived areas were not performing, this time around those from the deprived areas are doing very, very well; they are doing very, very well. In some of the schools, in some of the cases, in some of the institutions, it's even better than some of the big schools. Now teachers are being, they are dedicated, they have been re-oriented, they have gone through some training programmes....so as a result of that the teachers in very deprived areas are also doing very well, and that has actually increased the admission of such products into tertiary institutions... (ibid.)

The figures presented under distributive justice in this chapter hardly supports the argument of GOP1 to the effect that the teacher training programmes is increasing the share of schools in the rural areas in HE, since a quarter of all undergraduate admissions at KNUST during the period 2009-2014 was taken up by only 10 upper secondary schools. One-third of admissions at UG from 2006-2014 was also taken up by just 10 schools suggesting the persistence of the spatial inequalities. Perhaps, GOP1 is making reference to the non-university sector, which is beyond the scope of this study to which he admits rural students are being channelled to. Even so, one wonders how teacher training programmes alone would result in an increase in student numbers having regard to the hydra-headed nature of the phenomenon;

...if you look at the polytechnics majority of the students there are from very deprived areas; the polytechnics they also admit more students and if you go to the private

institutions that is where the chunk of students from the deprived areas are actually studying. (GOP1)

The views expressed by the participants, thus far, point to the fact that spatial inequalities in education in general and HE in particular, cannot be divorced from the socio-economic deprivation and exclusion plaguing the larger society— the two spheres are not mutually exclusive. This finding is consistent with the results of the study of the participation of young people (18-19 years) in HE in England by geographical location discussed in Chapter Four which reported deep divisions in the prospects of young people aspiring to enrol in HE with those from the most advantaged 20% of areas being five to six times more likely than the least advantaged 20% of areas to enrol (HEFCE, 2005: 10, 11). The participants' reference to the high socio-cultural endowments the urban dwellers start life with, the channelling of rural students into low-tier HE, as well as the growing private HEIs also strengthen the EMI concept adopted for this study.

SP6 who describes himself as urban, proposes a solution to the problem of exclusion of the rural folks from HE:

The one [student] in the rural area should be weighed higher than the one in Accra. They should give the rural people the chance. If they [rural and urban] get the same grades, then the rural person is better. (SP6, male, Economics & Mathematics)

6.9 Disability

This section sought to understand the experiences of students with disabilities primarily in one of the case study institutions. Two student-participants were interviewed—SP1 with mobility impairment and SP2 with visual impairment— in addition to the official in charge of the unit responsible for their welfare. As can be seen from the rest of the themes, these students responded to all the other issues like their counterparts, however no other student spoke about the situation of students with disabilities than SP1 and SP2. The two students indicated during the interview that their conditions of disability are congenital. They shared with me their educational experiences from childhood.

6.9.1 Previous Educational Experiences

SP1 sums up her experience throughout her education as a student with disability as one that “has not been very easy”, making specific reference to her ordeal in the upper secondary school:

It has not been very easy. Let's say when I was a kid it was more difficult as a kid but as an adult it's OK. For instance, when I was in secondary school, I think that was where I really had a lot of challenges; because for instance, where my class was we were in a storey-building and we have to always climb stairs up and down, up and down. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

She was apparently studying in an educational facility that was not disability-friendly and she disclosed that the school did not do anything about her situation which she attributed to the fact that she was the only physically-challenged student in her school:

...With my condition, I was the only physically-challenged person so the school really didn't make provision for me so I just had to cope with whatever condition I was in... (ibid)

SP1 further disclosed that she was often confined to her classroom even during the school's breaktime because she could not bear the discomfort of climbing and descending the staircases. Besides, some of the teachers would not countenance her lateness to class:

So when I go to school for instance, I don't come out the whole day; because I can't come down and go up, come down and go up, yes. So I was always in classroom not going anywhere, even breaktime you can't go because in fact if you go and like the bell is rang for breakover, you are now coming, it will take time and some teachers don't really tolerate that so you just have to stay behind. The best your parents can do for you is to give you all your food and stuff so that when you get to class you eat and stuff like that which wasn't very comfortable, yeah, but we managed though. (ibid)

Although she did the best she could to stay happy despite the challenges she faced in SHS she admitted there were times she really felt bad mostly, during those breaktimes when all her friends were going out but she was compelled by her condition and the ill-suited facilities to stay back. Even though some of her friends offered to keep her company during such times, she was also not happy because she felt she was denying the friends their breaktime:

I was always happy even though sometimes I felt bad but anyone around me wouldn't know I was feeling bad because I won't let you know I'm feeling bad. The times when it was breaktime and people were going out and you can't go, those times I felt bad. (SP1 female, Sociology & Social Work)

I asked SP1 if she thought the challenges she battled with negatively impacted her academic performance, to which she replied:

Yeah, for that one it did because sometimes you will not eat, you will be hungry and you just have to like sit down and you can't even concentrate but you just have to sit down and study which wasn't very smooth, yeah. (ibid)

SP2 rather had his basic education in a specialised school for persons with visual impairments but had to transition to the mainstream, for his upper secondary education where he had to contend with even more challenges than that of SP1. Apart from the difficulties and the delays that accompanied his admission to the SHS which in his own account, was a result of some problems from the examining body, the basic infrastructure and support services to make his educational experience a pleasant one were virtually non-existent. His catalogue of challenges included the lack of textbooks in braille, open drains, teachers with no training in special education, social isolation and stigmatisation from fellow students without disabilities:

...There were certain basic things that we didn't have. For example, the school's rules and regulations were not in braille for us, so a sighted student would have to read them to my hearing, and then textbooks that we needed most; all the textbooks none of them was in braille, they had to be read to us by the sighted students every time and everyday.

And some of the teachers too did not have any knowledge about special education but they were teaching us. You could see that sometimes when they are teaching they fail to, they even forget that there are persons with visual impairment in their class so they are sometimes reminded that these and these people are in the class so please, don't write on the board; and even if you write on the board explain what you have written on the board or just make mention of what you've written on the board. And there were other challenges with locomotion on campus too. When we were in SS [SHS] some major gutters were not covered; I mean the drains were not covered. There were some important places that we needed to go to but there were gutters there, so anytime we had to go there it means we had to get assistants to help us out, and it's not every time that the sighted colleague will get time for you.

So sometimes we move around ourselves and when we fall into the gutter, we will rise and get up, we rise and go! There were other challenges too bothering on how our sighted colleagues, how they even treated us. At a point in time they discriminated against us. Some of them said our condition was contagious therefore they wouldn't assist us even if we were going to fall; even if we were going to crash into things, they never assisted us because they had the mindset that our condition was contagious, therefore immediately they touch us or they get close to us, they will also be infected. (SP2, male, Political Science)

Clearly, the experiences of both SP1 and SP2 bring to the fore not only the discomfort such vulnerable students contend with in their quest for education but most importantly, the life-threatening encounters they endure in educational institutions as SP2's allusion to falling and rising in uncovered drains proves.

Troublingly, Ghana passed the Disability Act 715 of 2006 almost a decade ago that mandates educational institutions to ensure that the facilities available are disability-friendly, Section 17 of which states: "The Minister of Education shall by Legislative Instrument designate schools or institutions in each region which shall provide the necessary facilities and equipment that will enable persons with disabilities to fully benefit from the school or institution" while Section 21 requires that educational institutions enrolling students with disabilities also make provision for sign language in the case of those with hearing impairment, and braille writing and reading for the visually-impaired.

Ironically, the Disability Act of 2006 compels parents and guardians of children with disabilities to enrol them in a school, failure of which has grave consequences: "A parent, guardian or custodian who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten penalty units, or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding fourteen days" (Section 16 [2]). So why should parents and guardians of children with disabilities be compelled to send them to school and imperil their lives when the facilities to ensure they receive the same education as their 'abled' counterparts are non-existent? Besides, SP2 for instance has had a very chequered financial path to education, and has only survived up to the university level through the largesse of his benefactors; meanwhile, Section 18(1) of the Act stipulates that "the Government shall provide free education for a person with disability". SP1 also recalled instances where she had to stay away from school because the parents did not have the means to hire a taxi for her (as her condition demands), to go to school on a daily basis,

being constrained by the circumstances to pretend sickness, when friends for example, enquire about the reason for her absences from her school⁸⁰.

Surprisingly, SP2 braved all the odds to put up a performance that could simply be described as outstanding in the upper secondary school matriculation exam – the WASSCE which facilitated his admission to the university:

I had 07; I had B3 in English, I had A1 in History, I had A1 in Government, A1 in Akan Language, I also had A1 in Social Studies (SP2, male, Political Science).

He argues that he could have even done better if the facilities were adequate, and also positively asserts that his situation could probably have been worse if he had been born as a sighted individual:

I could have done better if I had the facilities that I'm having now, or I could have done better if I had all what I'm enjoying now. Because it could be that even if I were sighted, I wouldn't have had all these opportunities so, in everything you must give thanks to your Lord. (ibid)

SP1 and SP2 also shared with me their experiences in the university ranging from the admission process to accommodation on campus.

6.9.2 Admission to the University

Both SP1 and SP2 had some issues with the fairness of the admission procedures to students with disabilities. To my question, as to whether or not the admission requirements were fair to all applicants, both SP2 and SP1 registered their dissatisfaction and frustrations:

It's not. It's not at all. And sometimes when we are coming, we need to go for interview; we the persons with disability we have to come for interview before we are admitted. That's particular with [UG], but our sighted colleagues, they do not come for any interview. When you are supposed to be admitted, they are given the admission and they go and prepare and come to school. Our time for instance, we came for interview, I think I came for my interview on the 8th of October; my admission letter was given to me somewhere around 16th October, 16th October! I had to leave and go and come to school on the 21st of October. By that time our sighted colleagues had come to school long ago, they came to school like September 15 there, and we had taken a month before coming to school, so it's not fair to us; seriously, that one it's not fair! (SP2, male, Political Science)

...For the physically challenged, we have to go through so many processes which sometimes delays our admission. It affects us a lot; sometimes you come to campus and your required courses have already been registered. So because of that you have to stay behind and then wait when it is re-opened then you can join. Yes, so it affects us, delays in accommodation and stuff like that. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

⁸⁰ See the comments of both SP1 and SP2 under Family income/Wealth (6.6.3) in this chapter.

Understandably, SP2 and SP1 are not happy with the way their folks are recruited, which in their opinion seriously impacts their studies and life in the university. The officer-in-charge, however, took me through the procedures for admitting the students the institution refers to as students with 'special needs':

...We do the short-listing, those who have applied and have indicated that they have disabilities, we do a short-listing of them. Then we invite them for interaction to see whether really they have such problems. There is a medical officer that is the Director who is also on the panel, he does most of these things. Then also we assess the level of disability whether 60%, 20% or whatever. So this is what we do when it comes to the admission process. (HOP1)

So the delays and lengthy processes SP2 and SP1 allude to are actually a fact-finding one to ascertain the veracity or otherwise of their claim to disability. But one wonders why these checks cannot be done earlier to facilitate the early admission of these students who are the most vulnerable; to ensure that they adapt to campus life in a good time? Why do they have to travel long distances with all the risks and the stress involved to the university campus to be physically present for an interview when their colleagues without disabilities do not have to go through that?

HOP1 further highlighted some subtle differences in the admission criteria for persons with disability indicating for example that while the visually impaired are required to have passed five subjects at the WASSCE with at least Grade C6 in each of them, those with other forms of abilities are required to pass the six subjects, as is the case for students without disabilities:

...Because of their special needs, there is a policy that we don't look at the cut-off if only they meet the minimum requirements. You see, if you take for instance, those with visual impairments they don't do Mathematics because of their SHS background and we don't also look at Integrated Science so they are exempted from Maths and then Science. So apart from these subjects, whatever grade, say up to C6, if the person has up to C6 in five, that is three of the elective subjects and then Social Studies, the person qualifies. So about five subjects.... In terms of number of subjects, the visually impaired needs five whilst the others need six. (HOP1)

As I intimated early on in this chapter, the C6 is minimum grade established by the NAB and the NCTE for HEIs to admit students, and its implementation is strictly enforced to the point that students with disabilities are subjected to the same policy. HOP1 opined that in terms of equity of access for students with disabilities, his observation from a study tour of his outfit to one of the schools for hearing impaired in the country was that students with hearing impairments are more disadvantaged as far as the admission process is concerned. He grounds his argument on the fact that the WASSCE does not properly cater to their needs in the assessment process; a situation which in his opinion, is telling on the number of students with hearing impairments admitted. He adds that only one is currently enrolled in the University:

...The deaf, we noticed that their problem is even worse than the visuals. The damage caused to the brain is worse than the visuals. What we saw was that they are more

vulnerable because they can't speak and hearing also becomes a problem. And when it comes to the WAEC exams, there are lot of things that the teachers complain about. You see, they should have been given access to the student by way of signing and all that, but that is not part. So you see they are disadvantaged, and it reflects on their admission here. You may get about, at the moment we have only one, I think one or two here if you compare their number to that of the visuals. So this is one very important thing that we observed... It affects their performance and they can't write good English so they should find a proper way of assessing them. (HOP1)

SP1 narrates how scared she was enrolling in the university due to the challenges she went through at the upper secondary level. She was on one hand happy enrolling in the university, and on the other sad for fear of a repeat of her secondary school encounters. Her university experience, however, turned out to be a 'comfortable' one:

OK when I was coming to the university, you know the truth is that when we were almost completing school I was **scared** of going to the university because I didn't know that life in school would have been comfortable like this. I thought like, you were going to be alone, individual, I heard that when you come to the university, no one will be here to help you, you have to do things on your own and stuff. Although, I was happy that I was going to university, but I was **sad**, and I was scared too. So when I got to campus, I wasn't really happy. For the first semester, I didn't know anywhere, I didn't know what I was doing; yeah, until I registered with the association [office] before life became comfortable for me. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work. Emphasis not mine)

Her experience highlights how students with disabilities who are capable of, and qualified to access HE may decline to do so when traumatised by previous educational experiences. The situation further highlights the need for more information and education at the lower levels, about the facilities and support services available at the level of HE to prevent potential students from dropping out earlier in the educational continuum.

6.9.3 Support Services for Students with Disabilities

During the fieldwork, I learnt that the university SP1 and SP2 are enrolled in has the 'best' facilities and support services for students with disabilities in Ghana at the HE level. In my interview with HOP1, therefore, I enquired from him what informed the decision by the University to establish an office for students with disabilities. He offered this rationale:

The University is committed to a policy of giving equal opportunity so far as university education is concerned, and also to ensure that people with disability are given fair treatment so far as their academic; you know, career is concerned. So that was the major aim for the management creating this office. (HOP1)

Impressive as the rationale for the establishment of the unit is, HOP1's claim of ensuring that persons with disabilities are given fair treatment does not seem to accord with the gripes SP1 and SP2 expressed earlier, about the lengthy processes they had to go through which did not only affect the admission process, but their academic and social life on campus. He made further reference to the group of persons the University classifies as persons with disabilities or special needs:

...When we talk of disability, we have those with visual impairment; someone will say blind but we want to avoid the term blind. Then we have hearing impairment, then we have physical mobility, then we have also medical problems - sickle cell, diabetes and some with epilepsy. (HOP1)

HOP1 then detailed the range of support services the University provides for these category of students which basically comprises braille and transcription, sign language, note-taking, and encouragingly, the introduction of the visually impaired to the use of computers:

We facilitate their learning; not only academic but their social activities whilst on campus... the support services we give them vary from disability to disability. If you take those with visual impairment, we offer braille assistance. We braille their learning materials, then we transcribe for them also. Of late, we are introducing the use of the computers which they use to write their exams. They started just last semester so a few of them about 14 of them used the computer to write their end of semester exams and it went well, perfectly. But before that there are some SHS that have introduced the use of computers, so some come already well-equipped with that computer skill. Then we have note-takers, they attend lectures with the students and then take notes for them; then the hearing impaired also we take notes for them. There are some also who are dumb, they have speech problems so we also sign; so they use the sign language, we have resource persons who do that for them. If you come to the mobility, for them we also take notes for them especially where they have problems accessing the lecture halls, where they have to climb and then go upstairs, we take notes for them. Then also for those with medical problems, in case they are in crises and they are probably admitted in the hospital we also take notes for them. So basically, these are the sort of support services we give them. (ibid.)

The students (SP1 & SP2) were generally praiseful about the University's support services but also they reported serious challenges impacting both their social and academic life:

...I was *scared* of going to the university because I didn't know that life in school would have been comfortable like this. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work. Emphasis not mine)

...I must say that the UG has done absolutely well. They've done a lot of good to we persons with special needs, because there are other institutions who are not enjoying certain privileges that we are enjoying over here. The UG has really done well, and the Office for Special Needs too; I must say that had it not been their existence our stay in the UG would have been very miserable because they would have to braille our handouts for us, they would have to take those who are hearing impaired to lectures and take their notes for them. They help us in many, many ways, many ways which are countless; so they deserve the much commendation and the much attention from the UG. (SP2, male, Political Science)

The students also found the accommodation services satisfactory:

OK the halls of the residence it's OK. For instance, in Sarbah Hall; I'm in Sarbah Hall they've made provision for us, they've given us down floors —all the special students are on the down floor. They've given each of us an inner room where we can study, privacy; they've made a special bathroom for us where they've provided a chair for those

who cannot stand. So for Sarbah Hall I think they've really tried. They are catering for us a lot, but I don't know of the other halls. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

The finding on general satisfaction is harmonious with Sachs & Schreuer's (2011) study which compared the experiences of 170 students with disabilities with 156 without disabilities in HEIs in Israel. They reported that the former category was more satisfied with their achievements and participation than the latter. They attribute the feeling of success to the fact the students with disabilities compared their success with other persons with disabilities who have not had the opportunity to enrol in HE, and also the successes they are able to chalk despite the challenges they face in HE.

6.9.4 Challenges Confronting the Students with Disabilities

In a critique of the utilitarian calculus which tends to measure an individual's well-being by happiness or the fulfilment of desire, Sen (2009: 282,283) notes that the "hopelessly deprived people may lack the courage to desire any radical change and typically tend to adjust their desires and expectations to what little they see as feasible. They train themselves to take pleasure in small mercies".

Although SP1 and SP2 claim life in the university has been made comfortable, their comments, when I asked them to indicate some of the challenges that are facing in the institution rather indicate that the very problems that plagued them in the upper secondary, have followed them to the university. Top on the list of challenges are mobility on campus in general, and accessibility to the lecture theatres in particular:

Attending lectures is one of the big blows that we have on campus, because if you have a friend who is leaving for a lecture and you are not ready, he will go and leave you; it means you won't go for that lecture, and then if you choose a course that your friends are not doing, you wouldn't get anyone to take you to the lecture. So it means you have to be forced to drop that course and go and choose the one your friends are doing so that they can assist you to the lecture hall. And then for the persons who are physically challenged, I mean those who have problems with their legs; sometimes they go to the lecture hall, when they get there they would have to climb the staircase and get up there. If nobody tempers his rush with mercy, then it means the person wouldn't go for the lecture because someone would have to carry him or her up there, if there is no one, then that's it!...(SP2, male, Political Science)

OK, the lecture halls, some of them. I don't know whether they don't know they have special students among them or what; but the classes are always on top and we have to like climb stairs, as for me I can manage by God's grace but there are other students who use the clutches and the walking sticks, some are in the wheel chair, you know, they can't climb that thing; so people have to come and carry them to the classroom which I think, it's very embarrassing! I mean, you know, when that thing is going on the whole class is looking at you, you will not feel comfortable. Even when the lecture is going on you will still be thinking about what you went through before getting there, yes! (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work)

Apparently, the issue of mobility and accessibility to the lecture facilities is one that is taking a serious toll on both the academic and social life of the students with disabilities, to the extent that in the case of SP2, he does not even have the luxury of choosing the

courses he is interested in, but is being compelled by the situation and his circumstances to choose courses that persons who voluntarily offer to assist him will do. As he rightly pointed out, they are at the mercy of such voluntary assistants and attendance to the lectures is not even guaranteed. These are buildings with no functioning elevators fitted to them which goes back to the provision by the Ghana Disability Act, 2006 mentioned earlier, which stipulates that such facilities should be in place. HOP2's comment on the issue clearly suggests that the University is very much aware of the problem, but the seeming inaction stems from the non-availability of funds for such purposes:

...The physically challenged; those days buildings did not have them in mind, and so we've had to take some measures to accommodate them...but in terms of access to lecture rooms and so on, a lot more needs to be done. So basically in terms of resources ---fiscal resources and human resources--- with the funding policies of government now, I mean, it's really difficult to get funds to do some of these things. (HOP2)

HOP1's comments on this issue somehow contradict that of SP1 who claim that note-takers are assigned by his outfit to help students with mobility impairments:

...If you come to the mobility, for them we also take notes for them especially where they have problems accessing the lecture halls, where they have to climb and then go upstairs, we take notes for them. (HOP1)

HOP1 however identified inadequate personnel as one of the challenges his outfit is grappling with. Granted that there are note-takers for students with mobility problems, it is only part of the solution to the problem, since it does not afford the students the opportunity to have a direct contact with the lecturer and the chance to hear, contribute and possibly ask questions during the lecture.

For SP1, the problem goes beyond just accessibility; proximity is also an issue;

...And then the venues to the lecture halls too they are just too far, and some of the places too they've designated that no taxis should go there. So it means that when you pick a taxi from this point to the other point, you have stop and do the rest; you have to walk to the place, meanwhile you can't walk too. By the time you get to the classroom you are very **tired**, you feel dirty [slaps her palms], a whole lot! Yeah, a whole lot! (SP1, female, Sociology & Social Work, emphasis not mine)

The university authorities have blocked some roads in the institution which are mainly used by pedestrians to motor traffic, particularly students, presumably to avoid casualties resulting from overspeeding; but as SP1's account indicates, this action was taken oblivious of the circumstances of such students. With no provision for a vehicle to carry the students with disabilities to and from lectures, this is a measure that is strangulating students like SP1, however good the intention of that directive might be. HOP1, in fact, mentioned the issue of transportation among the constraints his outfit is dealing with:

...Then a vehicle, not only for the staff but for the students. You see the blind people when it's time for exams, they close late. They can stay in as long as maybe around 8 [pm], you

see, and at that time also most of their colleagues have gone to their rooms. So it's the resource persons who will have to guide them to their halls [residence]; so if we have a vehicle then the driver can just pick them and then just take them to their halls. So that is another challenge. (HOP1)

This situation is putting extra financial burden on these students who are struggling not only with their academic and residential fees, but also money for living expenses as the case of SP2 clearly epitomises. They often have to hire a taxi even for short distances on campus. SP2 also shared his frustrations regarding the reckless driving on campus. The open drains he had to deal with during his upper secondary days are still a threat to his life and safety, movement and convenience on campus:

...And the open drains on campus. In fact that has prevented most of us from moving freely on campus. So anywhere you have to go, you either go by a taxi or you go by a friend. If your friend is not willing to assist you then it means you will have to go by a taxi. And also, drivers also drive on campus anyhow because there are no indications, there are no inscriptions to indicate that there are persons with disability or there are persons with special need on campus so drive with care. At least that would prevent drivers from driving carelessly or speeding up at all times on campus. (SP2, male, Political Science).

Apart from the challenge posed by the disability-unfriendly lecture halls, the transportation and safety on campus, SP2 also made reference to the lecture delivery itself, indicating that some lecturers do not take cognisance of the presence of people with visual impairments, hence adopting teaching methods and materials ill-suited to their needs. So again, the problem he had with teachers in the upper secondary resurfaces in the university:

As a student with special need, sometimes you go for lectures; the lecturer comes, well he teaches though, but there are certain things he writes on the board and we are unable to see. So if no one draws his attention, it means we wouldn't see whatever is on the board, that's it! Some lecturers also come with projectors [slides], when they come they project whatever it is that they are teaching and then the sighted students will be copying it and we will be sitting aloof. So when the lecturer is done and you go nearer for the notes, he tells you that the University says we are not supposed to give our notes to students, therefore we become stranded. And the students too, we resort to them anytime lecturers say this to us, but you know students, most students write with short-hands and things, so you could take the notes alright, if you bring it to a friend to read it for you so that you can copy, the friend too is unable to read since some of them are short-hands. So at the end of the day you just go and submit the notes to the owner and then you depend on whatever you heard in class and use it to write your exam. (ibid.)

In my interview with HOP1, I enquired from him as to whether or not lecturers in the University are made aware of the presence of the students with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired, during lectures. Although he answered in the affirmative, SP2's comments above clearly indicate that more needs to be done on the part of the teaching staff to alleviate the plight of such students, since they are mainstreamed with other students in virtually all academic activities:

...The Office informs the various departments that we have such people or such a student in your department. So we alert them, and, even though examinations we inform them the number of students who are writing the paper at a particular time and they respond favourably to our request. So they bring their exam questions to the centre where they write the paper. It's here that we isolate them, especially the visuals because of the extra time that they need, yes. (HOP1)

Previous studies on the circumstances of students with disabilities in HE have shown that the awareness of the faculty and their attitudes to the needs of such students basically impact their success or otherwise as well as their inclusion in HE, and that negative attitudes from the faculty and administrative staff towards such students tend to hinder them from disclosing their conditions, and from requesting other facilities they are duly entitled to (Sachs & Schreur, 2011; Rao, 2004, Jung, 2003). Other scholars have argued that HEIs are often caught unprepared to provide HE of a high quality to students with disabilities. This is due to the fact the faculty is yet to fully understand and appreciate the instructional needs and other accommodations this category of students need. As a consequence, the faculty then becomes reluctant working with the students with disabilities because of this feeling of inadequacy (Humphrey et al., 2011; Orr & Hammig, 2009; Muller, 2006).

Dallas et al. (2011), thus, propose that rather than making academic accommodations, such as giving extra time for examinations and the use of human note-takers for students with disabilities, a more proactive approach will be to factor the needs of such students into the planning stage of the course design, a process also known as the *universal design for instruction* (UDI) which factors the needs of all the students into the course design. They claim that this should then benefit all students and not only those with disabilities. It further eliminates the retroactive approach of retrofitting course instructions by way of making accommodations for students with disabilities.

SP2, again, reported that students like him are having a hard time accessing books in braille from the University's library, citing unavailability and copyright issues as the primary reasons:

...There've been times that we've been to the school's library, that's the Balme Library; we've been there for books, we don't get the books because none of the books that they have there are in braille so we don't get the book; and we don't know where else to go and do our research work. And then even when you go to the Balme Library, there are certain books, we need to braille the entire book, but they say no; the school is a signatory to the copyright law therefore you can't braille a full book, it's only a part that you can braille, either a page or two or like just some pages in the book not the entire book. So those are some of the major challenges. (SP2, male, Political Science)

As I indicated earlier, apart from these difficulties, SP2 in particular has had to struggle financing his education from the basic up to the HE level. Students with disabilities are not exempted from the payment of all the academic and residential facility user fees their

peers pay, and this situation is becoming unbearable for SP2⁸¹. Although his institution has an office that administers financial aid to students, there is no special treatment for students like him. HOP1 confirmed the financial obligations of the students with disabilities and the lack of financial support when I quizzed him about the issue:

They pay the normal fees that any other person will pay, and you know, we have the Student Financial Aid Office which is just close by, so they compete with their friends for that scholarship. (HOP1)

This is another issue bordering on the implementation of the country's Disability Act, 2006 which provides that persons with disabilities are entitled to free education, although the Act itself fails to give any further details about what that entails except assigning that responsibility to the government.

6.9.5 Impacts of the Challenges on Academic Performance

Both SP1 and SP2 established a link between the obstacles they face in the University and their academic performance, with both reporting that their performance is being impacted negatively by the challenges they identified regarding accessibility and proximity to the lecture theatres, as well as the unavailability of suitable instructional and learning materials:

In some way, yes; because if I don't get notes and I don't get handouts, I'm unable to cope. So I'm not able to put up my best performance because I don't have the notes and I don't have the handouts. If the lecturer comes and he decides to project whatever he has to teach us, I'm unable to get the notes. Therefore, I wouldn't be able to put up my best when it comes to examination. So yes, it has affected my academic performance but all the same, I would have to just cope up and have no excuse. (SP2, male, Political Science)

Yeah they do [impact], because considering the lecture thing, personally, sometimes I don't want to go for lectures because when I go I will be so tired, especially where they say 'no taxis allowed'; it means I would have to walk. Let's say I have two lectures in a day, I go to that place, come back, by the time I go to the second place I will be so tired that I can't go. So what I do is that I normally go for the ones that the venues are not very far away, then I have some friends who go for the other ones, so I just contact them if necessary, then they give me whatever I need to know, yes, but once in a while I go for the lecture too, yeah. (SP1, female, Sociology & Social work)

HOP1 indeed confirmed some of the struggles the students with disabilities have had with their academic performance when I asked him to comment on whether or not they are able to retain them till they graduate and their general academic performance:

Yes, we do. Though some have some problems. From our investigation, we got to know that most of them are not pulling their weight, you see some may not graduate at the end of the programme, but some also do. Recently, we had a First Class hearing impaired student. They do well and most of them also come back to do their master's. (HOP1)

⁸¹ see the analysis on Family Income/Wealth in this chapter.

The performance of this category of students, clearly, could best be described as a 'mixed bag', suggesting that improving the basic infrastructure and support services would impact positively on their performance. HOP1 added that in instances where some of the students face expulsion for poor academic performance, his outfit steps in to make a case for them and also counsels the students not to make their situation an excuse for poor performance. In fact, the results of the study conducted by Sachs & Schreuer (2011) show that as far as academic achievement is concerned, the performance of the students with disabilities was as high as their peers without disabilities, noting that accessibility rather than ability accounts for the differences. In terms of social inclusion and participation in extra-curricular activities, a yawning gap was observed between the two categories of students, nonetheless. Mpofu & Wilson (2004) also documented a high drop-out rate among students with disabilities, especially by the end of the first-year in the university.

After the students (SP1 & SP2) reported the challenges confronting them, I sought to gauge their emotions about the issues and whether or not they affect their self-image. Their responses undeniably, highlight the disturbing effects on them. While SP1 showed empathy for those with worse conditions than hers, SP2 sounded ambivalent, concluding that the best that can happen is the bridging of the equality gap but equality between the abled and disabled would forever prove illusive:

It does, it does. If you are not really strong-willed, you will not even want to go for lectures. Those who sit in the wheel chairs especially, where you have to be carried everyday. I mean if you are not strong-willed you won't go, but for me I think I can manage because I don't really need help to climb but sometimes I feel for those who have to be carried and have to be assisted and stuff like that, I think it's not really helping, they should do something about their plight, yeah! (SP1, female, Sociology & Social work)

Sometimes, I pity myself for being in such a condition because if I had seen I wouldn't have been going through these challenges. But I also try to encourage myself and motivate myself that though I cannot see, I am challenging the sighted colleague intellectually, that is what I use to motivate myself. But these challenges, I'm hopeful that as time goes on and the University develops, most of these challenges would be averted and I'm sure there is going to be a time that the person with special need will also at least, be relieved of certain basic problems which could be attended. I'm not sure that there is ever going to be a time when the person with special need will be equal to the abled person but at least the gap can be bridged. (SP2, male, Political Science)

6.9.6 Career Plans and Ambitions

Notwithstanding the challenges confronting SP1 and SP2 in their studies towards the bachelor's degree, none of them gave any indication of abandoning their studies midway. They rather exhibited an astounding level of resilience and motivation. While SP1 dreams of going to a law school—an ambition which she earlier reported could not be realised because her father could not pay for her to pursue Law on a fee-paying basis—SP2 has set his eyes on a second degree, and eventually, a career with the United Nations. He will still be counting on the generosity of a benefactor to pursue a second degree though:

Well, it's my hope that if I complete UG in 2016, someone comes to my aid and helps me offer my master's within that year so that I can even postpone my [national] service to maybe 2019 when I'm done with my master's. Because completing with first degree, being a person with special needs, it's a bit difficult to even get access to a job because there a lot of abled persons who have come out with first degrees and are even searching for jobs and they are not even getting some, how much more you a person with special needs? That is why it is my hope that I attain my master's before my service; that's attaining my master's immediately after undergraduate... It's my dream to work with the United Nations. (ibid.)

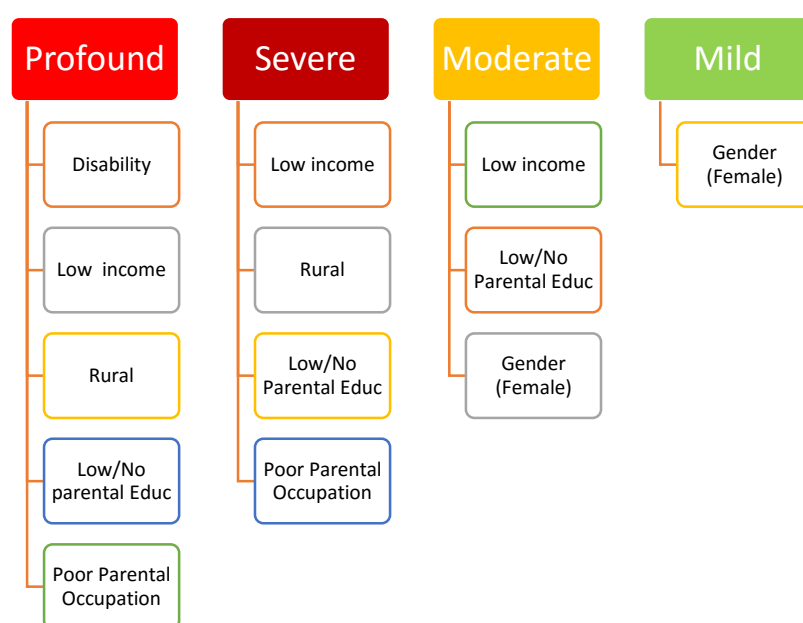
Yeah, my own future is bright; very, very, very bright because I'm in the university, I will finish by God's grace, I will get a good grade, I will graduate and then I will still go to Law School. I will still do what I want to do, yes! (SP1, female, Sociology & Social work)

SP2's motivation for the advanced degree is to a large extent, influenced by the dismal job prospects for undergraduates—a phenomenon which is real in Ghana— and he believes that pursuing further studies will give him some edge.

Concluding, SP1 had this recommendation for the authorities, albeit not directed to any specific agency:

OK, I think the plight of students with disability should **really** be looked at because it's not easy; it's not! But when you make provision for them, life will be a little bit comfortable for us all, yeah. (ibid., emphasis not mine)

Figure 11: Stratification in HE Access and Equity



Source: Author's construct

Figure 11 illustrates and sums up the influence of the socio-economic status (SES) and the other significant factors discussed in the second section of this chapter on the participants' access to and equity in HE. It demonstrates the level of interaction among

the variables discussed, indicating that almost all of them do not operate in isolation but interrelate and reinforce each other. The situation and circumstances of a good number of the participants (students and graduates) fit each of the four layers of stratification illustrated by Figure 12. SP2 with a visual impairment, a very poor family income, from a single parent home whose occupation he designates as a peasant farmer, and from a rural area, fits neatly into the *profound* category. Students in this category face the highest risk of not enrolling in HE, or when they do, might easily drop out. SP10, SP18 and GP1 would come under the *severe* category whilst SP5 matches the moderate. High SES participants like SP15, SP17 who describe themselves as urban from rich, highly educated families and have parents with high occupational status equally fit the mild category. The only challenge the two pointed out was the socio-cultural norms that tend to put impediments in the way of females in Ghana as far as their education is concerned. The section on stratification has also facilitated our understanding of the fairness or otherwise of the distribution of the HE opportunity pie in Ghana discussed in the first section where the income and geographical location variables, for instance, featured prominently in the discussion of the fairness of both the procedure and the distribution.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A society in which the success or failure of children with equal ability rests on the social and economic status of their parents is not a fair one. Not only is it unfair but it is a waste of the talents of those with potential from less advantaged backgrounds; damaging for the individuals, the economy and society. (McKnight, 2015)

This study, primarily, sought to explore and understand how opportunities for HE are distributed to students in the Ghanaian context. Specifically, it aimed at investigating who is getting access to university education as offered by the public universities, and to what? In terms of the academic programmes students choose to pursue or are assigned to them by the universities admitting them. In addition, for a more comprehensive understanding of these phenomena, the study was also interested in discovering how the participants (students and graduates) perceive and construct their socio-economic identities, and the extent to which such self-identified identities facilitate our understanding of the fairness or otherwise of the distribution of the HE opportunity pie in Ghana.

This final chapter relates the main findings to previous research and literature, makes recommendations for further research, and for both institutional and system level policy. The limitations of the study are equally highlighted.

7.1 Main Findings and Relationship to Previous Research

Two separate but related conceptual frameworks were constructed to give the study the necessary theoretical foreground and to further assist in the data collection and analyses. The first framework (see Figure 2) comprising procedural justice, distributive justice, meritocracy and affirmative action was to help answer the questions bordering on the fairness of the processes (procedural) and allocations (distributive) which led to the investigation of the admission requirements and processes in the public universities in Ghana and the representation of the various segments of the Ghanaian society in the universities in terms of the distribution of admission places. The second framework focused on the socio-economic variables and other significant factors relevant to the Ghanaian context, exerting influence on the fairness or otherwise of the distribution of the opportunities for HE. The influence of the following factors was therefore explored: parental education, family income/wealth, gender, geographical location and disability, and discussed in the context of the theoretical arguments on stratification in education in general and HE in particular. The EMI and the LCP proved relevant in that regard.

A key finding of this research is that opportunities for HE in Ghana are distributed primarily on the basis of merit which is defined by the participants – students, graduates, HEI and government officials as excellence in the school-leaving examinations, and as a consequence, the system largely rewards those with the highest grades. An upshot of this is that access is highly stratified particularly by the previous secondary school background of applicants as Figures 7a & 7b, as well as Tables 7a & 7b overwhelmingly confirm. While students who attend the elite upper secondary schools are almost certainly assured a place in the public universities, their counterparts from the less-

endowed schools only do so through what some participants call 'luck' and 'by the grace of God'. The primary reason accounting for the skewed distribution of admission places is the yawning resource gap between the minority urban-based elite schools and the majority rural-based less-endowed school—a fact admitted by all the groups interviewed. The finding confirms Addae-Mensah's (2000) research conducted a decade and a half ago in the same context, and further accords with Shavit et al's., (2007b) depiction of the phenomenon of 'persistence of persistent inequality'.

The fairness of the admission procedure to all applicants seeking admission with respect to the preparation and pre-entry stages (application, admission requirements, selection etc.) was key to our understanding of the fairness of the distribution. Procedurally, the meritocratic admission system proved unfair to students who attend the less-endowed schools, and who are required to take the same school-leaving exams with their counterparts from the elite schools and compete with them on the same basis for admission to the universities. How can the 'competence' and 'ability' of students who have studied under circumstances that are miles apart, as clearly demonstrated by the accounts of the participants, be adequately measured by a single criterion—performance in the one-shot school-leaving exam—to ascertain their admissibility or otherwise, into the universities? Although some argue (including some participants in this study) that doing so guarantees 'fairness' since the use of the grades ensures the application of a uniform criterion to make judgment, one wonders whether by doing so, admission officers are counting what actually counts and adequately measuring what should be measured.

Indeed, the excellent performance put up by the 'unmerited' who only got in through 'favour', 'luck' and 'by the grace of God', or nicely put, affirmative action, as both the HEI and public officials interviewed for this study attest to, sufficiently demonstrates that 'merit', as narrowly defined by school-leaving results is procedurally flawed and for that matter, will not work for the poor (Brink, 2009; Berg, 2010). Certainly, the excellence of students from the less-endowed schools admitted through affirmative action programmes is a testament to the fact that using grades alone to judge one's merit and potential could be detrimental.

Again, the very first stage of the admission procedure—the sale and purchase of application forms— as demonstrably illustrated by the stories of Olivia, Isaac, Peter, SP2, and GP2 from very poor backgrounds who either could not afford the form or struggled to do so, is resulting in brilliant brains being left in the 'drains'. These individuals either could not enrol or did so through sheer luck, favour and magnanimity of others. Who knows how many of such brilliant minds who have over-qualified on 'merit' have been left out or are not even aspiring to access university education for financial reasons, as they are scared away by the mere purchasing of application forms?

It deserves adding, that as far as procedural fairness is concerned, the fee-paying admission option though sanctioned by government, and appears to be the logical path

for the public HEIs to deal with dwindling budgetary allocations, presents another slice of stratification in Ghanaian HE⁸². It amounts to a ‘commodification’ of HE and can hardly pass the test of procedural fairness. Viewed from Leventhal’s (1980) six criteria for judging procedural justice discussed in Chapter Three, it obviously cannot stand up to the suppression of bias and the consistency rule, and to students like SP13 who more than qualified for admission—at least per the merits—set by the institution, the ethicality rule is also broken. If one is denied admission even when they have met the cut-off point, how can the same individual be then admitted when they pay to enter? In the same vein, how fair is it to deny one admission just by missing the cut-off point by just a point only to admit another individual several points away from the cut-off, just on the basis that they are putting in a higher bid? Should efficiency not be tempered with equity? “Education must be one and the same for all, and...the responsibility for it must be a public one, not the private affair it now is...In matters that belong to the public the training for them must be the public’s concern” (Aristotle, 1992 as cited in Nixon, 2012:18).

Another significant finding of the study was the sharp division between the students who attended the well-endowed SHS on the one hand and the less-endowed on the other. While the majority of participants belonging to the former category argued for procedural justice and meritocracy in the allocation of HE opportunities, and supported the maintenance of the status quo, the latter was pushing for distributive justice and affirmative action, adopting a more reformist stance. Evidently, the two groups were all pursuing their self-interest and exhibiting a phenomenon Stone-Romero & Stone (2005:450) call *egocentric bias*. It further confirms arguments that the motives behind justice can all be interpreted as self-interest (Greenberg, 2001; Ambrose & Arnaud, 2005). The ‘status quoists’ believe they worked so hard and by virtue of that they deserve being rewarded with the opportunity, and so rewarding others who did not ‘work that hard’ with the same opportunities would amount to arbitrary favouritism, reverse discrimination and the procedure would thus, be unfair (see Fraser, 1995; Morley & Lugg, 2009; Weisskopf, 2007; World Bank, 2006). These students clearly have economic considerations underpinning their self-interest; the fear that admitting such students would ‘proletarianise’ their programmes and make their degrees less valuable.

On the contrary, those from the less-endowed SHS and are under-represented in the universities regard the current procedure (admission requirements) as unfair to them. They support some different criteria for admitting their folks, quotas and affirmative action to make the distribution of the opportunities fairer. The result amply supports the first framework to the effect that those who argue for meritocracy often support their arguments with procedural justice, while affirmative action is rooted in distributive justice.

A rather surprising but interesting find was the affirmative action for females, which at UG, ensures that female applicants to the University, especially, in the humanities were

⁸² See GOP3’s comments under Procedural Justice in Chapter Six.

admitted a grade-point lower than their male counterparts. The policy does not appeal to the majority of females interviewed, despite the institution's intention of using it as a remediating tool, which has indeed, significantly improved the female share of enrolment. It is a confirmation of Moses' (2010) position that remediation as a rationale for affirmative action is fast losing its bite. What is puzzling about this result, however, is the rejection of the intervention by the very group that one would have expected to hail it. At the policy level, it further demonstrates the ills inherent in top-down policy interventions, and the need for broader consultations and voice, in policy-making and implementation. The renunciation of the affirmative action for females again expresses the allocator's (institution) 'taken-for-grantedness' that it understands the needs and sensibilities of the target (females)[see Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005]. It emphasises the two sides of the affirmative action debate—ensuring distributive justice but creating unfair processes and stigmatisation— which the majority of the participants alluded to. Affirmative action then becomes as Crosby et al,(2006: 593) put it, “a medicine that harms its patients”. Those objecting rather call for a more transformative approach such as removing the social controls and norms impeding the access and success of girls at the lower levels of the educational ladder, and by so doing, ensuring that the playing field is levelled for females as some scholars have argued (Moses, 2010; Fraser, 1995; Darity et al., 2011).

The gender variable proved very crucial to the understanding of the low representation of females in Ghanaian HE in general, and especially, their under-representation in the scientific and technical fields as well as their overrepresentation in the humanistic and care fields. The stories of SP5, SP11, SP12 and SP13 for instance enrolled in Biochemistry, Engineering, Architecture and Medicine respectively, bring to the fore, the complex challenges confronting females and their struggles, resilience and motivation to break the glass ceiling. The web of obstacles, as the study revealed, emanate from multiple sources: socio-cultural norms and beliefs, how the school and the home environments are structured, parental level of education among others. Some of these obstacles are often taken for granted, accepted and internalised by some of the females themselves as normal (see comments of SP11, SP7 and GP1 for instance). The posture assumed by the majority of the females interviewed, in my opinion, show that they are contending with forces too strong for them. The sentiments expressed, absolutely, reveal their dissatisfaction with the status quo and their seeming helplessness to deal with the obstacles that have become systemic and systematised.

Marriage, child-bearing and rearing, proved to be strong forces dictating the ambitions and pace of female education and career. Femininity itself was not found to be significantly impacting the HE experiences of the students from high socio-economic backgrounds (see Figure 11), which is consistent, to an extent, with earlier research reporting that even in countries with high enrolment gaps between children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, gender explains at most 38% of the total inequality, with poverty rather accounting for 50% or more (World Bank, 2012: 108,109). This should be interpreted though, with restraint since it captures education at a lower level for children aged 12-15 years and not precisely in HE.

Findings on the influence of parental education and family income on access to HE in Ghana are to a substantial extent, at odds with some earlier research (see Cheung & Egerton, 2007; Kohn, 1989; Berg, 2010 for example) which argued that parental education is a predictor of success in HE, and further, parents often consciously or unconsciously prepare their children for a class position similar to theirs. The stories of participants like SP2, SP10, GP2 with low or no parental education and from very poor income families, and the strides they have made in HE in the teeth of very difficult circumstances challenge these early research. What have been learnt, additionally, is that contrary to the notion—perceived or real—that students from disadvantaged backgrounds would drop out and are often less motivated to complete their studies, students who identified as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds (poor or no parental education, low family income, rural, disability) demonstrated a very high sense of resilience and motivation; and according to their own accounts, they did not contemplate quitting their studies although they admitted braving a lot of odds. A proof of this is that both GP1 and GP2, for example, exited their degree programmes with First Class Honours degrees.

Be that as it may, the cases of other participants like (SP4, SP15, SP17, SP11) whose attributes identify them as high SES (high parental education and occupation, high income, urban, elite upper secondary schools) strongly support the influence of variables like parental education, occupation, income and geographical location. Their accounts portray the desire and the efforts of their parents to prepare them for positions in society similar to theirs, as the actions of parents of SP13 and SP15, for instance, opting for the fee-paying admission option for Medicine and Nursing respectively, when they could not be admitted as ‘regular’ students on the competitive cut-off points illustrate. GP2’s explanation of how parents go to all lengths to put their children in either the same elite upper secondary schools they themselves attended or similar, to enable them ace the school-leaving exams so as to make admission to HE a breeze, further strengthens this argument. Lucas’ (2001) concept of EMI therefore proves very useful to understanding this phenomenon.

In the same vein, these findings fail to provide support for the concept of MMI which argues that educational expansion and increased enrolment would diminish inequality and mute the effects of social background. Evidence from this study clearly shows the desire of parents not just to educate their children but that they also keep an eye on qualitative differentiation not only at the upper secondary level but also in HE, by enrolling them in the most prestigious programmes at all cost, as the EMI contends. Besides, the participants’ allusion to the coaching and cheering they received from parents who have had HE experience, and the attempts by those without parents with such capital, to use some surrogates like radio talk shows and peers, challenge the argument of Muller and associates (1993)—the LCP—that individuals will be less dependent on parental resources at the level of HE. Pfeffer’s (2008) reference to children making use of both *content knowledge* and *strategic knowledge* as well as the arguments of others (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003; Bird, 2014; Corver & Dorling, 2005; Lucas,

2004) on the effects of social background on access and equity in HE are very much accordant with the results from this study.

The income variable coupled with the upfront fees and charges, basically underlay the access and treatment discriminations uncovered by this study. Participants who reported poor and average family incomes were as expected, suffocating under a system and institutional level policy requiring that students pay fees upfront either to take up admission offers or continue their studentships as the case may be, without corresponding guaranteed financial aid for the needy. Although, as noted earlier, this category of participants proved very resilient and resolute in the face of the financial hardships, they did not also hide their emotional trauma and deprivation as the stories of participants like SP2, SP10, GP1 and GP2 have shown. For these participants it is the hope of using HE for an upward social mobility that is still keeping the motivational flame ablaze.

The fee policy was also found largely to be responsible for the high incidence of students from the rural, less-endowed SHS not being able to take up admissions offered to them on affirmative action basis (see Figure 6). Low income as reported by participants in this study was largely reported with rurality, low parental education and occupation (see Figure 11), and vice-versa. The non-existence of funding from government to support the affirmative admission policies voluntarily instituted by the HEIs coupled with the dwindling overall budgetary support for the public HEIs, offer little or no incentive for them (HEIs) to increase admissions on affirmative action basis, but rather allocate those potential slots on fee-paying basis to balance their books. The UG succinctly captures this financial stringency in its strategic plan for 2014-2024, indicating that recovering the cost of HE from students is set to escalate: “The Government of Ghana remains a major funder but its support has dropped from being more than 90% of the budget to just over 55% in a decade. The significance of internally generated funds, relying extensively on fees from students, will grow” (UG, 2014: 6). It is a clear example of the trickle-down effect of macro level policy on both the meso and the micro. In a typical neo-liberal fashion, ‘the service provider’ is then compelled to pass on the ‘production costs’ to the ‘consumer’ in order to guarantee its continuous stay in ‘business’. The human capitalist, resourcist and functionalist view of HE then knocks out the capability and personal development approach (cf. Rawls, 1972; Meyer, 2013; Sen, 2009; McArthur, 2011; Nixon, 2012).

Evidence from this study shows that the students with disabilities, by far, face the highest risk of both external and internal exclusion—access discrimination and treatment discrimination—as Stone-Romero & Stone (2005) would put it. The challenges confronting them which are both personal and systemic transcend all the levels of education. The institutional adherence to the strict meritocratic admission requirements stipulated by the NAB means that the efforts of a good number of them who pursue their lower level education in very difficult circumstances go unrewarded at the HE level, while those who potentially meet the requirements might be scared away from pursuing HE due to the difficult experiences from the past educational institutions as SP1 and SP2

argue in this study. The absence of teaching and learning facilities well-suited to their conditions coupled with the financial constraints emanating from the absence of financial aid and fee-waivers as stipulated by the Ghana Disability Act 715 of 2006, means that this category of students face a high risk of dropping out and are being prepared for failure relative to their counterparts without disabilities.

Largely, the analyses on the socio-economic and other significant variables noticeably demonstrate that the factors that account for stratification hardly operate independently; rather, there is a strong interaction among these variables often leading to a layered and complex forms of inequality. As the model (Figure 11) clarifies, and the accounts of the participants confirm, some individuals are caught up in a more profound and complex forms of inequality than others. A student from a rural setting with a disability, from a very poor family with no formal parental education and a poor parental occupation as the case of SP2, for example, typifies is caught up in a web of inequality, the disentanglement of which is beyond the confines of HEIs.

This study, as far as practicable, sought to achieve both breadth and depth in the understanding of the phenomena, however I need to stress that it has primarily dealt with the goings-on in a section of the public universities. The private universities and polytechnics were excluded, and for that matter, the results and interpretations should therefore be appreciated and understood as such. That notwithstanding, the use of system level data coupled with the fact that interviews did not address issues pertaining to the case study institutions alone, but broadly the HE system in Ghana, should undoubtedly, make the study a useful mechanism for reflecting on the system in general.

In addition, in the coding, labelling and presentation of the data on the first four themes (meritocracy, procedural justice, distributive justice and affirmative), there were a few instances where data could fit two themes—meritocracy and procedural justice—for example, while others could fit both distributive justice and affirmative action. I therefore had to judge, after going back and forth, which theme will be the ‘best fit’ in such instances. This should in no way impact the analyses and interpretations. It rather emphasises Patton’s (2002: 470) argument that “the qualitative analyst is part scientist and part artist”, who among other things has to rely on their judgment, intelligence and experience in discovering patterns, categories and themes. Essentially, these instances only reinforced the propriety of the framework which has clearly pointed out the interactions between meritocracy and procedural justice on one hand and distributive justice and affirmative action. The overlapping, nonetheless, was not encountered in the second part of the analyses dealing with parental education, family income, geographical location and disability.

Future research into access and equity issues in Ghanaian HE might be targeted exclusively at the views and experiences of students, teachers and parents at the lower levels of education, especially in the rural upper secondary schools to directly gauge their aspirations for HE and the challenges confronting them. Although, this study

acknowledged that inequalities in HE transcends the immediate borders of HE, and as far as feasible, dealt with some issues from the lower levels, it could not directly deal with the afore-mentioned stakeholders. A direct encounter with these stakeholders in the rural communities should be illuminating since only a few, especially rural female students are in the universities where this study was pitched.

Other possible contexts for a study of this nature might also include the rapidly increasing private universities as well as the polytechnics which in the Ghanaian context, have virtually become 'second options' for students seeking HE in Ghana. A qualitative study investigating the motivations, experiences and satisfaction of students in these institutions could therefore be equally insightful. Finally, other researchers may well consider the possibility of adopting and refining the two constructed frameworks for researching similar phenomena in contexts other than Ghana.

7.2 Implications for Policy and Action

From the preceding discussion, I strongly believe that the findings of this study have a number of practical implications for policy both at the macro and meso levels to ensure that opportunities for HE in Ghana are fairly distributed.

The current merit-based admission system, at least as far as results from this research show, obviously does not work for the majority of students from the less-endowed upper secondary schools as both the government and the HEIs admit due to the huge infrastructural and resource gap between the urban and rural schools. While attempts by government to bring infrastructure in the rural schools at par with the well-endowed is commendable, and would help address the gap in the long-term; in the short-term, other criteria such as applicants' formative assessments from the upper secondary, motivational essays could be used in addition to the grades from the school-leaving exams to determine the admissibility or otherwise of applicants to the public universities.

Institutions like UG and KNUST deserve commendations for instituting affirmative action admission policies particularly for students from the deprived schools. As a matter of importance and urgency, an intervention from the government worthy of consideration, might be incentivising institutions like these through its funding allocation mechanisms to ensure students admitted through these interventions—the majority of whom are poor—are given fee-waivers, scholarships and other financial aid to ensure their persistence and success. In the meantime, a concerted action from both the HEIs and the government whereby the HEIs give partial or full fee-waivers through their internally-generated funds, and the government through the GETFund gives scholarships for living expenses and other indirect costs could be worthy of consideration. However, affirmative action should only be seen as a temporary measure to equalise opportunities due to its procedural limitations.

The current application system which requires that applicants to the universities pay to apply to each institution, as revealed by this research, is doing harm to both access and equity for the poor but brilliant and motivated students despite supporting the revenue

base of the universities. To ensure a level playing field for all applicants, a centralised admission system could be instituted with the cooperation of the HEIs, the NCTE, NAB and other relevant stakeholders, such as the recently launched Central Applications Clearing House (CACH) in South Africa, for example. This would serve the twin purposes of reducing the application costs for applicants while eliminating the duplication of admission offers for students who currently apply to and get offers from different institutions only to turn them down later, when other duly qualified applicants had already been turned away. It should also assure prospective applicants and parents of a 'fair' admission procedure. Such a system, should not necessarily affect the autonomy of the HEIs and the freedom of choice for students. At any rate a similar mechanism—the CSSPS—is already in place for admissions from the basic to the upper secondary level in Ghana.

It is important that the Government of Ghana in collaboration with the HEIs take immediate and decisive steps towards easing the access and treatment issues confronting students with disabilities. Provisions in the Disability Act 715, 2006, which guarantee free education and disability-friendly infrastructure in the various educational institutions as, this study has shown—cognisant of the few individuals interviewed on this variable—which have hardly been addressed after a decade of the passage of the Act, should as a matter of justice and equity, be implemented not only to encourage such students to enrol in the HEIs, but to also ensure that they succeed.

Although much has been achieved with the establishment of the Girl-Child Education Unit at the GES, as well as the vigorous 'send-your-girl-child-to-school' campaigns initiated about a decade and a half ago, much more needs to be done to drastically reduce, if not remove the obstacles females encounter in their quest for education. It is clearly an issue beyond the remit of the Ministry of Education and the GES, but one requiring a more multi-sectorial and coordinated approach to deal with the entrenched socio-cultural norms and practices that negatively impact the education of females even at the HE level, as evidenced by the findings of this research. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and allied institutions such as the National Council for Civic Education (NCCE) could be brought on board in the pursuit of such a cause.

The financing of studies, as demonstrated by the stories and experiences of the participants interviewed for this study, is the greatest challenge confronting poor students and those admitted on affirmative action basis from the rural settings. The situation is aggravated by the upfront fee policy that has been operating in the HEIs, and the inadequacy and availability of the student loans. It is therefore recommended that the fees be abolished for students from the low socio-economic backgrounds who prove incapable of paying the fees. In the worst case scenario, the payment could be deferred until employment after graduation, and paid in the form of a graduate tax or similar as pertains in the Ethiopian context, for example. This group of students are also debt-averse, and for that matter, a loan system might not work for them. For a country with a

tertiary GER of approximately 14% and attainment rate of less than 5%, this should not be too high a price for the government and taxpayers to pay. Their success in HE and subsequent upward social mobility, all things remaining constant, should make such a great difference for them as individuals, their families, communities and the country at large, in addition to making them role models for their respective communities and schools.

7.3 Conclusion

This study has shown that generally, opportunities for HE in Ghana are distributed through merit-based admission procedures favouring and endowing a minority group with the majority share of allocations. A number of socio-economic factors, family income, previous upper secondary school attended, geographical location influence who gets access, and to what? Taken together, these findings suggest that parental socio-economic characteristics which largely influence the endowments which children start life with, play a crucial role in understanding stratification in HE. The prevailing institutional structures mainly serve to perpetuate the existing gaps between children from advantaged and disadvantaged origins. This research complements and confirms earlier studies in other contexts, and further enriches our understanding of the concept of EMI. The claims of MMI and LCP, as far as this study goes, were largely not supported.

Indisputably, the results of this investigation show that these are matters too complex for HEIs alone to handle since the root causes lie buried in the inequalities confronting the larger society. How HEIs and governments, therefore, would solve this puzzle of ensuring individual rights and interests through a meritocratic process believed to guarantee procedural justice, or pursuing the greater social justice and interest by adopting measures—ensuring distributive justice through affirmative action—that would loosen the grip of the privileged few on the opportunity pie, would still linger.

What this research has essentially accomplished is that it has been able to connect concepts that have hitherto not been connected in the discourses on access and equity issues in HE. Elitism in the selection of students in HEIs and systems, for example, is frequently discussed from the viewpoints of either meritocracy and or affirmative action with little or no appeal to procedural and distributive justice, correspondingly, from which the two concepts take their shade and strength. This research which uniquely triangulates data and concepts should therefore help bridge the gap. HE as a field has traditionally borrowed concepts and theories from disciplines such as sociology, economics, political science and history, and this study, by virtue of its pragmatic approach, has followed in that tradition drawing on literature and concepts from HE, sociology, political science, organisational justice among others. It largely represents a modest contribution to sociology of HE in general, but most importantly, to the literature on the subject matter in a lesser known and studied African context. This investigation, likewise, opened up several angles for further research. It has, to a substantial extent, fulfilled the researcher's goal of bringing a comprehensive understanding to the phenomena studied, and giving the marginalised a voice.

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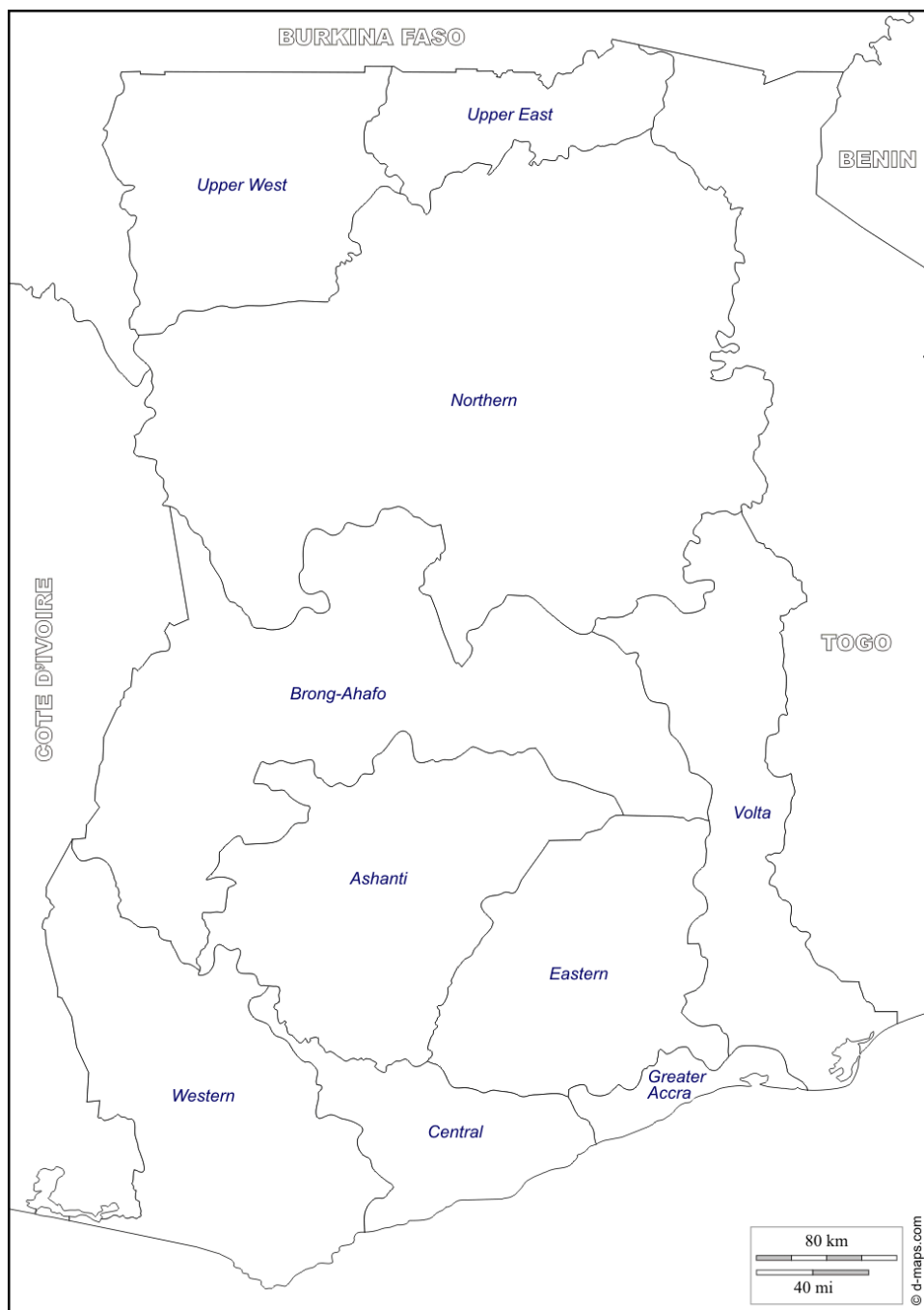
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Political Map of Ghana



Source: D-Maps

Appendix 2: Distribution of Population in Ghana by Region, Gender and Locality, 2010

Region	Total Population	Male	Female	Locality		Share of Pop.(%)	% Urban
				Urban	Rural		
Ashanti	4,780,380	2,316,052	2,464,328	2,897,290	1,883,090	19.4	60.6
Brong Ahafo	2,310,983	1,145,271	1,165,712	1,028,473	1,282,510	9.4	44.5
Central	2,201,863	1,050,112	1,151,751	1,037,878	1,163,985	8.9	47.1
Eastern	2,663,154	1,290,539	1,342,615	1,143,918	1,489,236	10.7	43.4
Greater Accra	4,010,054	1,938,225	2,071,829	3,630,955	379,099	16.3	90.5
Northern	2,479,461	1,229,887	1,249,574	750,712	1,728,749	10.1	30.3
Upper East	1,046,545	506,405	540,140	219,646	826,899	4.2	21.0
Upper West	702,110	341,182	360,928	114,653	587,457	2.8	16.3
Volta	2,118,252	1,019,398	1,098,854	713,735	1,404,517	8.6	33.7
Western	2,376,021	1,187,774	1,188,247	1,007,969	1,368,052	9.6	42.4
All Regions	24,658,823	12,024,845	12,633,978	12,545,229	12,113,594	100.0	50.9

Source: Adapted from Table 3 GSS, 2013:10.

